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ABSTRACT

This final report resulted from a 1-year evaluation of three Area Learning Support Teams, intended to provide a flexible and coordinated learning support service in three secondary schools and associated primary schools in one region of Scotland. The study interviewed 26 key people and used questionnaires to elicit opinions of 163 others. Findings and recommendations are grouped into six categories: (1) overview (e.g., a high regard was exhibited toward learning support staff by headteachers, mainstream teachers, and parents); (2) management of learning support (the role of team leader was a critical one); (3) responsibilities of the team leaders (no mandatory teaching responsibility is recommended to free leaders for the learning support coordination task); (4) concept of a team (team cohesiveness takes a long time to develop and such activities as staff development seminars may reinforce team cohesiveness); (5) team objectives (specific, realistic, and attainable objectives need to be identified by team members; and (6) team members in the classroom (greater involvement by team members in joint lesson planning and consultation is recommended). (Four references) (DB)

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Teaming-Up

Area Teams for Learning-Support

Julie Allan
Pamela Munn

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Area Teams for Learning-Support

Julie Allan
Pamela Munn

The Scottish Council for Research in Education

SCRE Research Report No 38

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PREFACE

This is a final report arising from a one year evaluation of Area Learning Support Teams in Dumfries and Galloway Region. Area teams, consisting of both teaching and non-teaching learning support staff, were established in three secondary schools and their associated primaries. The aim was to provide a learning support service which was responsive to needs, flexible and co-ordinated. SCRE was commissioned jointly by the Region and the Scottish Office Education Department to evaluate the new arrangements within the three teams and we record our findings in this report. This project follows previous SCRE research on mainstream provision for pupils with learning difficulties, reported in *Off the Record* (Allan, Brown and Munn, 1991)

We are grateful to the Region and the Department for providing the funding. We should stress, however, that the views expressed here are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Department, the Region or SCRE. Our sincere thanks go to Mrs Christine Fergusson and Mr Stuart Beck, the representatives of the Region and to Mr Arthur Rankin HMI, who gave us valuable advice and support throughout the project. We would like also to thank Professor Sally Brown, who acted as consultant to the steering groups of the area teams and contributed to the initial planning of the research.

This evaluation would not have been possible without the co-operation of the members of the three area teams and the staff of the schools involved and we thank them wholeheartedly. We are particularly appreciative of the help which the team leaders gave us and of the enthusiastic way in which they participated in the evaluation. Finally, we would like to thank Janette Finlay and Amanda Evans, who helped to produce the final version of the report.

Summary and Recommendations

A policy for the integration of pupils with learning difficulties into mainstream schools and classrooms has been in operation in Dumfries and Galloway Region since 1983. In an attempt to improve provision further, the Education Committee adopted a new policy for learning difficulties in December 1988. Central to this was the introduction of area learning support teams, headed by an area team leader and consisting of both teaching and non-teaching learning support staff. Each team provided learning support for pupils with learning difficulties in one secondary school, its associated primary schools and nursery units. The area teams were to be phased in gradually and three area teams were established in the first instance.

SCRE was commissioned jointly by the Region and the Scottish Office Education Department to evaluate the new arrangements for providing learning support and to examine the support provided by a small sample of team members within mainstream classrooms. We begin this report with a summary of our findings and recommendations. The subsequent sections provide a more detailed account of the progress of the teams so far. First, we describe the research approach on which these findings are based.

Research approach

We sought the views of a range of people associated with the three area teams, either through face-to-face interviews or via questionnaires. We interviewed a total of 26 people, including the three area team leaders, a sample of learning support staff, members of each steering group overseeing the introduction of area teams and parents. We distributed 163 questionnaires to a sample of mainstream staff and to all learning support staff not interviewed. In summary, the following people have had the opportunity to make their views known:

- all members of the three area teams
- all headteachers of the secondary and primary schools directly involved in each area
- all members of each of the three steering groups
- a sample of 45 mainstream teachers from primary and secondary schools in each area.

Attendance at a sample of steering group meetings and area team meetings provided us with additional information. It is important to stress that our findings from the first strand of the research are based on the *perceptions* of various people about the work of the teams. It was not within our remit systematically to observe the teams in action. The second phase of our work involved some direct observation of team members engaged in co-operative teaching with mainstream staff. We report on this in the final section of the report.

We should stress, also, that we are reporting our findings at a very early stage in the life of the area teams. As with an evaluation of any innovation, the picture we present is an historical one. Things have moved on since we conducted our interviews and distributed our questionnaires. Furthermore some of the early difficulties encountered, such as the non-payment of special needs auxiliaries for attendance at team meetings are now known to Regional officials who are taking action on them. Our findings, therefore, are intended to be helpful in two main ways:

- pinpointing key, short-term, targets for new area teams as they come into existence
- looking ahead to major developmental issues for area teams, in the longer term.

Our findings and recommendations are grouped under six main headings. The first section provides a general overview of reactions to the area teams. Subsequent sections look more specifically at the issues of the general management of learning support within the area team framework, the responsibilities of the team leaders, the concept of 'a team' and the benefits of establishing team objectives. Finally, we make a few suggestions, based on our observations of team members working within classrooms, alongside mainstream teachers. We repeat that our findings are from the early operation of teams and are based on 'soft evidence', that of opinion. It is, of course, for the Region to decide how best to proceed and for other regions considering similar initiatives to decide whether the findings have implications for them.

Findings and recommendations

1. *Overview*

1.1 Prior to the introduction of area teams, the work of learning support staff was highly valued by the majority of headteachers, mainstream teachers and parents. This high regard continues, as the area teams sustained the day-to-day support which team members provide within mainstream classrooms.

1.2 Headteachers welcomed the establishment of the area team leader post. They saw such a post as enhancing the provision and co-ordination of learning support. They reported that area teams were more responsive to school and pupil needs than the previous system.

1.3 Area team members said that they were better supported than in the past. There was a clearly identifiable and visible leader to whom they could turn for help. This is especially welcome to primary staff, many of whom worked in a number of schools.

1.4 Mainstream staff and parents did not notice any change in learning support provision. This is unsurprising in a context where the organisation and management of learning support altered but the kind of support provided on a day-to-day basis did not.

1.5 There was concern that the needs of special needs auxiliaries were not being adequately met within the team structure. Regional officials indicated their plans to take action on this.

1.6 Staff development so far has been focused within area teams. This is not surprising. However, there was a risk of diverting attention from learning support teachers' development work with mainstream staff.

2. *Management of learning* support

2.1 The post of team leader was crucial in managing learning support The support they offered to headteachers, and to team members was viewed by them as invaluable. In one area team the roles of team leader and principal teacher were combined. The lessons learned from this experiment suggested that this was not desirable.

2.2 Team leaders needed a line manager who was not directly involved in schools on a day-to-day basis. Team leaders welcomed the opportunities to share concerns with a 'critical friend'. It was important that the line manager was in a position to act upon requests made by the area team leader and had access to resources and to influential decision makers.

2.3 A steering group, comprising headteachers of the secondary schools and selected primaries of each area team, helped to oversee their work. This helped to develop the work of teams and a forum to discuss the problems of implementing the new system.

2.4 Team leaders could be assisted by being given a clear indication of the extent of their budget as soon as possible after they are appointed.

2.5 Consideration needs to be given to the size of the team. If it comprises members from a large number and range of schools, it may be difficult for cohesiveness to develop.

2.6 It was important that team meetings were held in a convenient location for the members, whether this was a school or an office of the Regional Psychological Service. Nevertheless, team leaders need a base. Our evidence suggests that a base away from school is desirable.

2.7 Our evidence suggests that headteachers and mainstream staffwere and continue to be satisfied with the kind of help they receive from learning support staff, for example through co-operative teaching or the preparation of learning materials. The area teams did not therefore alter radically the nature of learning support provision received by schools.

3. *Responsibilities of the team leaders*

3.1 The main responsibility of team leaders was co-ordinating resources within the team. The leader, therefore, needed to know what these resources were and to learn to take difficult decisions about priorities. This was recognised as an important area for staff development.

3.2 There were considerable advantages in having the seniority of the team leaders recognised within secondary schools, through membership of the senior management team or the board of studies. It is important, however, that this does not result in learning support becoming a peripheral aspect of the schools' provision. A key responsibility for team leaders is to keep learning support staff informed of school management decisions and to involve them in school-focused, in-service activities.

3.3 Team leaders were well placed to be the main providers of staff development for team members. However, there was no need for team members to be excluded from staff development programmes within their own schools.

3.4 Team leaders need to encourage members to contribute to the staff development within their own schools, fulfilling the role as consultant. This would ensure the continuing high level of commitment among mainstream staff to the integration of pupils with learning difficulties.

3.5 Our evidencesuggests that there should be no mandatory teaching responsibility within the team leaders' remit, although it may be appropriate for them to provide help to overcome short-term difficulties experienced by pupils. This would enable them to fulfil a more substantial staff development role within the teams.

3.6 The team leaders could be given some responsibility for the administration of Record of Needs. We would envisage, however, that this could in turn be passed on to schools.

3.7 Promoted posts, within the teams, could be established. These posts might carry responsibilities for specific areas of the team's work. There would then be at least one other individual in the team who could deputise for the team leader if the need arose.

3.8 The staff development needs of team leaders need to be identified, enabling an induction programme for future team leaders to be established.

4. *Concept of a team*

4.1 Team cohesiveness takes a long time to develop and happens through collaboration on specific tasks. Members indicated that artificial attempts in team building such as simulations were unhelpful and time-consuming.

4.2 Teams need to experience opportunities to reinforce their cohesiveness. The most successful appear to have been staff development sessions concerned with the roles and responsibilities of members.

4.3 Every effort needs to be made to ensure that all members feel that they are valued. Much of the responsibility for this lies with the team leaders. However, conditions of employment are also important and the Region's intention to improve the pay and conditions of special needs auxiliaries is welcome.

4.4 Mainstream staff and headteachers need to be informed of the purposes of the area teams and of the activities of individual teams. Additionally, attempts should be made to involve them in team projects.

5. *Team objectives*

5.1 Specific objectives, identified by team members, can provide a sense of purpose and achievement, and can foster team cohesiveness.

5.2 It is important that the teams identify objectives that are realistic and attainable. The objectives chosen, improving inter-sector liaison and increasing parental contact, were appropriate in this context. Teams also need to identify targets, plan activities and think ahead about the kinds of evidence which might indicate whether their objectives have been achieved.

5.3 Our evidence suggests that mainstream staff and headteachers need to be made aware of the objectives selected by team members and need to, wherever possible, be involved in related activities. This builds learning support as an activity for all staff.

6. *Team members in the classroom*

6.1 The introduction of the area teams did not affect significantly the classroom practice of the team members and this was welcomed by mainstream staff and headteachers. They continued to be satisfied with the quality of the support provided by team members within the classroom.

6.2 In the co-operative teaching arrangements we observed, learning support staff were not involved significantly in the joint planning or teaching of lessons. We recognise that such a level of co-operation takes considerable time and effort to achieve. Staff development

opportunities for members, provided by team leaders, would help them to develop more effective co-operative teaching relationships.

6.3 It is important that consultation time, when mainstream and learning support teachers can plan their approach to co-operative teaching, is safeguarded at all levels. Senior management could encourage staff to make good use of this by requiring them to produce evidence, such as development plans.

Clearly there are areas in which further improvements can be made. Nevertheless, all those involved with the teams should recognise that a great deal has been achieved in the first phase of this major initiative. We now consider our findings in greater detail.

1 Introduction

In recent years, the integration of pupils with learning difficulties in mainstream schools has become widespread practice in Scotland and the United Kingdom. Among the first Regions to establish a policy for integration was Dumfries and Galloway, which did so in 1983. The majority of pupils with moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties, who had previously been educated in special schools or in special units within schools, were placed in mainstream schools. As far as possible, these pupils and others with less pronounced difficulties were to be taught within mainstream classrooms, with some being withdrawn to learning centres within selected schools. The principal role of learning support staff, formerly remedial teachers, became one of assisting the mainstream teacher **in the classroom**, through co-operative teaching and the production of learning materials, which sought to take account of the diversity of learning needs.

Responsibility for the overall management of learning support provision was held by the Region's Psychological Service. This was decentralised to a considerable extent to try to overcome some of the problems posed by the size and geographical spread of the Region. The Region was divided into five districts with a senior educational psychologist responsible for the provision within their own district.

There was considerable commitment within the Region to continue to educate pupils with learning difficulties in mainstream schools. In an attempt to improve provision further, the Education Committee adopted a new policy for learning difficulties in December 1988. Central to this policy was the introduction of area learning support teams, headed by an area team leader and consisting of both teaching and non-teaching learning support staff. Each team provided support for pupils in one secondary school, its associated primary schools and nursery units. The area teams were to be phased in gradually and three area teams were established in the first instance. Throughout this report we consider the experiences of the three teams so far and ask what lessons can be learned which might benefit future teams. The focus of our research had two strands:

- to find out if the introduction of the area learning teams has been viewed as effective by those who have been involved
- to obtain a snapshot of team members working within classrooms, alongside mainstream staff.

The recommendations we have made at the beginning of the report are based mainly on our findings from the first strand. Our aim, in the second strand, was to obtain specific examples of co-operative teaching arrangements and to explore more generally some of the issues which emerged.

The introduction of the area teams was aimed at providing a learning support service which held to the primacy of the needs of the individual child. It was hoped that by allowing teams to concentrate their efforts on the needs of the pupils within a single secondary school and its associated primaries, they would be **responsive** to those needs. The diverse nature of pupils' needs was recognised and it was hoped that the teams, which were multidisciplinary and included both teaching and non-teaching staff, would be able to take account of this diversity in their response. One focus of our report is, therefore, on the responsiveness of the area learning teams to pupils' learning needs. We consider the experiences of the team members and their clients so far and ask if the teams have been more responsive to needs than had previously been the case.

Clearly, the needs of pupils with learning difficulties are not static and the teams would have to be **flexible** in order to take account of changes in the needs within the schools they served. This meant that both teaching and non-teaching staff could be moved from one school to another if necessary. We try to identify the extent of the flexibility within the teams to enable them to respond to changes in needs.

The organisation of teaching and non-teaching learning support staff into teams would, it was hoped, result in a more **co-ordinated** approach, whereby a team leader would oversee the work of individual team members and liaise with different groups. We ask if the service provided by the teams is co-ordinated more effectively than under the previous arrangement.

It had been proposed that the first of the teams to be established would involve Dumfries High School, Lockerbie Academy and Stranraer Academy, together with their associated primary schools and nursery units. However, one of the difficulties during the early phases of the introduction of the area teams was the uncertainty which appeared to surround them. Crucially, there was much debate about whether the teams were being phased in, as had been indicated in the Education Committee Report of December 1988, or were to be introduced on a pilot basis, as had been stated publicly by some Regional officials. Confirmation of this had been sought on several occasions by both headteachers and team members, but the uncertainty remained, despite the firm statement in a memo sent to schools that the area teams were to be phased in.

The status and future of the teams had considerable significance for potential candidates for the posts of team leader, particularly of the Stranraer team, which for many candidates would have involved a move to that part of the Region. As a result of the difficulties in appointing a leader to the Stranraer team, the decision was taken to establish an alternative team involving Sanquhar Academy and its associated primaries.

Certain individuals played key roles in the early stages of the formation of the teams. The headteachers of the three secondary schools and selected primaries, together with the district senior educational psychologists and the adviser (pwld), formed steering groups for each of

the area teams. The Dumfries team was also joined by a learning support teacher and an adviser. A Regional steering group, comprising the three district senior educational psychologists, the adviser and the principal educational psychologist, was established to oversee the steering groups associated with the area teams. The adviser appeared to play a crucial role during this phase, as the only individual to be a member of each of the groups. He introduced some uniformity across the three steering groups, for example in the appointment procedures for team leaders, while also encouraging them to act independently. He was able to offer suggestions to individual steering groups, based on the experiences of the others and kept the Regional steering group informed of progress.

A major task of the steering groups was to appoint the area team leaders. Once this had been achieved, each of the steering groups gradually assumed a less prominent role, with meetings being held less frequently. Those involved, however, still viewed them as having a valuable function, as they gave the team leaders an opportunity to report on progress within the teams and enabled any difficult issues to be tackled. The steering groups also provided an early opportunity for the team leaders to establish good relationships with the headteachers of the primary and secondary schools. The senior educational psychologists were responsible for overseeing the work of the team leaders and helped them to adjust to the demands of their new role. Their constructive advice and support was appreciated by the team leaders.

The decision to establish an area team in Sanquhar rather than in Stranraer, together with the uncertainty over its future, did little to engender confidence among team members, headteachers or mainstream teachers. Indeed, one of the first, and arguably most difficult, tasks faced by the team leaders was to provide headteachers and area team members with opportunities to air publicly any grievances concerning the area teams, in the hope that these might be resolved and to try to encourage a positive regard for the teams. The amount of praise for the area teams which emerged at a later stage is perhaps a testimony to the effectiveness of the team leaders in handling this difficult period sensitively. Below we describe our research approach.

The research approach

We sought the views of a range of people associated with the three area teams. These included individual team members as well as those involved in a management capacity. It was important also to find out how headteachers and mainstream staff, as the clients of the teams, viewed their work. Our approach had two strands: face-to-face interviews with a small number of people and questionnaires, distributed to a much larger sample. The interviews took place in November and December 1990 with the following individuals:

Table 1.1: Interview sample

Personnel	Numbers Interviewed
Principal Educational Psychologist	1
Adviser (pwld)	1
District Senior Educational Psychologists	3
Area Team Leaders	3
Steering Group Members	9
Learning Support Teachers	3
Parents	6
Total	**26**

Questionnaires were distributed to members of each area team and to headteachers from the associated schools. We excluded the headteachers whom we had already interviewed. A sample of mainstream staff in these schools was also asked to complete questionnaires. We were encouraged by the number of completed questionnaires we received from team members and school staff. Table 1.2 indicates the total number distributed and returned from each group.

Table 1.2: Questionnaire sample

	Area Team Members		Headteachers		Mainstream Staff	
	Distributed	Returned	Distributed	Returned	Distributed	Returned
Lockerbie	20	18	12	6	20	16
Dumfries	36	24	10	7	27	16
Sanquhar	19	15	1	1	18	13
Total	**75**	**57**	**23**	**14**	**65**	**45**

Total number of questionnaires distributed = 163
Total number of questionnaires returned = 116

It is always difficult to evaluate an initiative which is evolving. It takes time for any evidence, which might indicate whether or not the change has been effective, to emerge. Nevertheless, it is possible to look for evidence at an early stage, providing it is treated cautiously and definite conclusions are avoided. Our evaluation is based on four main kinds of evidence:

- opinions of team members, headteachers, mainstream staff and parents
- Regional documents indicating the purposes of the teams and the role of the team leaders
- documents produced within the teams, relating to members and activities

- a limited amount of observation of meetings of the area teams and the steering groups.

We should stress that these kinds of evidence are of the 'soft' variety, based essentially on people's views of the teams. We have no data, for example, to indicate whether the teams' specific objectives had been achieved; we can only report on the extent to which individuals **thought** there had been improvements.

In this report we ask how effective the area learning support teams in Dumfries, Lockerbie and Sanquhar have been. Has provision in these areas become more responsive, flexible and co-ordinated? In Section 2 we consider whether the significant changes in the management of learning support have enabled these purposes to be fulfilled. We then go on to discuss the specific responsibilities of the three team leaders and ask how effective they have been. In Sections 4 and 5 we examine what is understood as the concept of a team by various parties, then report on the specific objectives which teams set themselves as a focus for their first year's work. Finally, our focus shifts to the team members within the classroom and we examine four co-operative teaching arrangements. First of all, however, we consider what the teams have achieved so far.

An overview of the area teams' achievements

Any discussion of the area teams' achievements has to take place against a background of considerable satisfaction with the help and advice offered by learning support staff before the introduction of area teams. Both mainstream staff and parents were highly appreciative of learning support staff and valued their contributions in preparing curriculum materials and in providing support in classrooms. It would be unrealistic, therefore, to expect dramatic changes to have taken place to the nature of the support provided. Indeed it must be of some comfort to the Region that for most of learning support staff's customers it is 'business as usual' and a service of high quality continues to be delivered. Most of the changes have been to the management and organisation of learning support.

In the short time in which teams have been established they have:

- set up systems to deploy staff where they are most needed
- enhanced the status of learning support through seniority of appointment of team leader and membership of senior management teams in secondary schools
- increased team members' knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of colleagues in other sectors and/or with specific remits
- been successful in some requests for more resources
- identified specific objectives within individual teams.

There have, of course, been difficulties during the early stages of the introduction of the teams. Perhaps the most notable has been the conditions for the special needs auxiliaries. This issue generated the most heated response to our interviews and questionnaires. Concerns about their low status reflected in their rate of pay, their non-payment for attendance at

team meetings and their lack of career structure emerged forcefully. The Region is now tackling this in a positive way. Another major organisational difficulty was brought about by the experiment in Sanquhar to combine the post of team leader and principal teacher of learning support. The problems of such a combined post have proved intractable and the Region is unlikely to make future appointments of this kind.

This leads us to our final introductory point. We are reporting our findings at an early point in the development of area learning teams. The picture has changed since we conducted our interviews and distributed our questionnaires and is likely to change further. So far, the benefits of the teams are reported as outweighing the costs. We look at these in more detail in the sections which follow, beginning with the management of learning support.

2 Management of Learning Support

Significant changes were made to the general management of learning support in the three areas in which the teams had been established. Some of these related to organisational aspects, such as the deployment of resources or arranging cover during staff absences. Others concerned a more fundamental restructuring of line management. We ask:

- Did the changes to the management of learning support enable provision to be more responsive to pupils' learning needs within the teams?
- Was there greater flexibility in that response? Specifically, were the teams able to take account of the changes in pupils' learning needs, through the appropriate deployment of team members?
- Was provision more co-ordinated as a result of the management changes? If so, did it affect the identification and meeting of needs within the teams?

In trying to address these questions, we turn first to the changes which were made to the way learning support was organised generally.

Organisation of learning support

The changes to the general organisation of learning support were concerned mainly with a decentralised allocation of resources to each team to enable it to make provision for the needs of the pupils within its area. In addition, the teaching and non-teaching learning support staff were placed outwith the staffing complement of the schools. The latter had more significance for the secondary than the primary schools. Primary learning support staff had been members of the Regional Psychological Service for some years previously. The main implication for the schools was that learning support staff should not be asked to provide cover for their mainstream colleagues. As far as learning support staff and auxiliaries were concerned, they were obliged to inform the team leader, rather than the school, if, for example, they were to be absent. Most learning support staff, however, saw it as a courtesy to inform the school also, since their message could take some time in being relayed from the team leader's base.

Membership of each of the three teams consisted of all learning support staff and special needs auxiliaries from a single secondary school, its associated primaries and nursery units. Educational visitors, teachers of the visually and hearing impaired and peripatetic learning support staff were also team members, even if they taught in the schools only on a part-time basis. A few of these individuals belonged to more than one team.

The Dumfries team also included staff from Langlands, the last remaining special school in the Region and the learning support teacher from Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary. Clearly there were potential advantages for both Langlands staff and those based in mainstream

schools from developing links such as these. Nevertheless, some people questioned their involvement, suggesting they had very different interests from the other team members. It also increased the membership of the team beyond what many felt to be a manageable size.

Inevitably the exact composition of the teams changed from time to time, as individuals changed employment. In Table 2.1 below we list the relative sizes of the three area teams. These are approximate figures, based on the membership at January 1991.

Table 2.1: Approximate sizes of area teams

Area Team	Number of Members	Number of Schools
Dumfries	36	12
Lockerbie	20	15
Sanquhar	19	3

In Section 4, we discuss the importance of the size and the composition of the teams to the cohesiveness within them.

As far as the actual day-to-day identification and meeting of needs was concerned, headteachers and mainstream staff of both primary and secondary schools experienced very little change. Given the general satisfaction with these processes prior to the establishment of the teams, this evidence is heartening. Few alterations, for example, were made to the staffing complement of individual schools or to the remits of individual members and so most continued to work in the same schools as they had done previously, doing largely the same activities. This proved to be highly reassuring to headteachers and mainstream staff, who stressed the importance of the continuity of support provided to individual pupils. Some headteachers reported that, where there were changes to learning support staff, the team leaders now consulted them beforehand. They had not always experienced this in the past and welcomed the opportunity it gave them to communicate their own views regarding changes to staffing in their school.

Most headteachers indicated that they had been well satisfied, prior to the establishment of the area teams, with the quality of the learning support in their school, even if they viewed the amount of provision as inadequate. Most anticipated that the quality would be enhanced indirectly by the organisational changes within the teams, but found it difficult to pinpoint any specific areas of improvement in their schools, either in the identification or in the meeting of needs.

Changes which were made to the provision in a school usually concerned staffing or other resources, such as learning materials. They occurred as a result of changing circumstances within the school, for example the

emergence of temporary learning difficulties in one or more pupils. In other instances, the staffing allocation was altered following consultation between the team leaders and headteachers, regarding the adequacy of existing provision. Understandably many headteachers could make a case for increasing the staffing complement within their own schools. Responsibility for deciding which needs took priority over others lay primarily with the team leaders, who spoke of considerable difficulties in trying to reconcile the conflicting demands on finite resources. The consequences of increasing the staffing allocation in one school would be a reduction elsewhere. These changes to staffing and to the availability of resources were viewed by headteachers, mainstream staff and team members as the most accurate indicators of the responsiveness and flexibility of the teams. We consider these below, by first asking if the teams were more responsive.

Responsive?

Of the 14 headteachers who returned questionnaires, nine said that since the formation of the area learning teams, pupils' learning needs had been responded to more quickly. However, only eight out of 45 mainstream staff thought this was the case. The main impact of the teams' responsiveness, then, seems to have been been at a whole school, rather than at a classroom, level. Headteachers obtained help from the team leaders either by making specific requests directly or through more regular contact with the team leaders. Many headteachers indicated that the team leaders responded to any requests they made for help very quickly and appeared to be sympathetic to the circumstances of individual schools. The requests tended to be concerned with three main aspects of learning support provision:

- help with identifying or meeting the needs of particular pupils within the school, for example by providing additional staffing to overcome temporary difficulties experienced by pupils
- help with identifying or meeting the needs of all pupils with learning difficulties generally, through the provision of relevant advice on strategies or changes to the staffing complement within the school
- support for recorded pupils.

One of the most demanding tasks which the team leaders had to undertake was to decide which learning needs in the schools should take priority over others. There is no easy way of doing this and the team leaders will already have gained a great deal of experience in making judgements of this kind. Inevitably, in some cases they were not able to respond to requests from headteachers with additional staffing. Nevertheless, headteachers felt that they were now in a situation in which their pleas were being listened to more carefully, which they felt they had not always experienced in the past.

The team leaders' ability to respond was, of course, constrained by the amount of resources available to the teams. However, they gained the

impression that these resources were negotiable, having witnessed changes to the staffing allocation of teams which had been sanctioned at a more senior level in the Region. The dilemma which they faced was whether to deny a school the staffing increase they requested, because they did not think it could be met from within the existing staffing allocation of the team, or to make a case for the allocation to be increased if they felt the request was justified. Senior managers are accustomed to such situations. The team leaders were less familiar and had to gain experience. Perhaps this is an aspect of the role which could be developed through training, using real case-studies as examples.

Team leaders' regular contact with headteachers and team members enabled them to anticipate many of the difficulties which might occur and to provide help at an early stage of the onset of problems. Headteachers and team members welcomed being able to communicate their concerns on a range of learning support matters to the team leaders, regardless of how minor these appeared to be. They said that previously they waited until difficulties, for example with individual pupils, had become more serious, before asking for help. To sum up, area teams were seen, particularly by headteachers, as providing a responsive service. The team leaders played a key role in this context by establishing regular contact with headteachers, anticipating difficulties, listening sympathetically to problems and providing support. This consisted of advice, provision of learning materials, deployment of staff and, from time to time, direct personal intervention with pupils experiencing learning difficulties.

We turn now to the question of whether there was greater flexibility in the teams to enable them to respond to any changes in the learning needs of the pupils.

Flexible?

There was widespread agreement on the need for learning support provision to be continuous. It was vital, for example, that staff in schools, particularly mainstream teachers, could rely on support from learning support staff whom they knew. It was essential also that learning support staff were able to develop good relationships with mainstream teachers in particular schools, as one team member cautioned:

> If there is constant movement of staff there is the danger that we would return to the old fashioned remedial teacher, ie come into school and take children away to remediate.

Flexibility was important, however, in order to respond to **changes** in the learning needs of pupils in the schools or to provide help where existing needs were not being met. This meant that while the staffing levels of teams would remain relatively constant, it was important that staff could be moved to different schools within the teams if necessary. Additionally, flexibility within the teams could allow movement of staff between

sectors. It was hoped that this would improve the transition of pupils between primary and secondary schools and lead to better relationships among staff in both sectors.

Headteachers and team members thought that there was sufficient flexibility within the teams to enable help to be provided, often by the team leaders themselves, to identify the learning needs of individual pupils or to resolve temporary difficulties. Some headteachers, however, made the observation that the extent of flexibility within the teams had not yet been tested. This would be indicated by how the teams were able to cope with a radical change in the needs within a school, brought about for example, by a child with profound special needs or a group of children with English as a second language entering the school. Such situations would require more substantial changes to the staffing complement of the school. Concern was expressed among these headteachers that the teams might not have this degree of flexibility. This was because it seemed to them that the staffing levels of the teams were such that any increase in one school would be to the detriment of needs elsewhere within the team. Headteachers were not confident that requests made by team leaders for increases to the staffing allocation would be successful because they thought there were insufficient resources within the Region. However, it appeared that all reasonable requests had been met so far and that the Region were prepared to make adjustments to the staffing complements of individual teams as and when necessary.

The flexibility of the team to allow members to work in different schools was thought to have contributed to one of the major achievements of each of the area teams, notably the increased awareness by team members of the roles and responsibilities of staff working in different sectors. Some of this had come about as a result of a movement of staff between sectors, for example a secondary learning support teacher teaching in a primary school. Team members saw this as leading to improvements in the identification of needs and in pupils' transition from primary and secondary school, although they had no direct evidence of this. Some individuals, however, reported that they had adapted a few of the ideas they had obtained through their experiences in other sectors to their own classroom practice. Many team members thought that their own teaching was bound to have become more effective, because they had developed a greater understanding of what the pupils experienced within each sector.

The flexibility within the teams to develop cross-sector links had been limited by GTC regulations regarding the qualifications considered necessary to teach in particular sectors. This prevented teachers with secondary school qualifications from teaching anything other than their own subject in primary schools. A secondary learning support teacher, therefore, who is qualified in mathematics could provide support in a primary class in that area, but not in language work. The regulations were being examined further, since members made it clear that they wished to extend inter-sector links. We turn now to the question of whether the teams were more co-ordinated.

Co-ordinated?

The organisation of learning support within individual teams would, it was hoped, result in a more co-ordinated approach to learning support provision generally. By this it was meant that the resources of each team could be focused directly on the needs of pupils within a small number of schools and be overseen by one individual. There was widespread agreement that a more co-ordinated approach to learning support had developed since the establishment of the teams. The team leaders were viewed as instrumental in promoting a co-ordinated approach within the teams, since they had been given overall responsibility to do so.

The majority of mainstream staff and headteachers noticed very little change in the kind of support they received. This is reassuring, given the general satisfaction prior to the establishment of the teams. However, a few headteachers and mainstream staff said that the procedures for making referrals had become more precise, that is they were clearer about who should be contacted and when. A small number of headteachers and mainstream teachers also suggested that pupils learning needs had been identified more often than had previously been the case.

We tried to find out from headteachers and mainstream staff whether there had been any changes to the amount of help they received from learning support staff. Table 2.2 below shows their responses.

Table 2.2: Changes to meeting needs

Area Team	Number of Members	Number of Schools
Dumfries	36	12
Lockerbie	20	15
Sanquhar	19	3

Team leaders had some responsibility for virtually all aspects of learning support, under the direction of the senior educational psychologist. We list these below:

- deployment of all area team members within the pre-school, primary and secondary sectors
- arranging cover for absences of team members
- co-ordinating the resources within the team
- expenditure on individual items, eg small equipment
- responding to direct requests for help from schools
- providing general support to schools
- providing general support to team members
- co-ordinating the exchange of information within the team and with schools

- liaising with various agencies, eg medical services or speech therapists
- administration of Record of Needs
- monitoring the identification and meeting of needs within the team
- undertaking career reviews for team members
- provision of staff development for team members.

Prior to the establishment of the area teams there had been a great deal of concern among headteachers, particularly from the secondary schools, that they would lose control over the kind of learning support which was provided within their schools. Given that there have been few changes to the identification or meeting of needs on a day-to-day basis, their concerns appear to have proved groundless. Many headteachers of both secondary and primary schools reported distinct advantages in the co-ordination of learning support taking place outside the school. The most important benefit to headteachers was that their workload was reduced since they no longer had to take responsibility for many aspects of learning support in their school. However, the Region have continued to exhort all headteachers and mainstream staff to accept responsibility for the needs of pupils with learning difficulties.

In Section 3, we consider in more detail the team leaders' role in providing support to both schools and team members. In doing so, we draw attention to possible negative as well as positive outcomes of this.

The exchange of information within the teams and between teams and schools had, headteachers thought, improved greatly over the course of the year. Newsletters had been established within teams for the purpose of disseminating information to members. Headteachers also found these a valuable source of information about team activities. Team members suggested that the exchange of information between sectors was far more effective and had led to improved relationships, based on enhanced understanding of the roles and responsibilities of members working in different sectors.

As far as team members were concerned, only seven out of 57 team members had noticed any differences to the identification of needs, the most significant of which was increased contact with staff from other sectors. However, 17 members thought there had been improvements in the way needs were met. These related mainly to a more effective deployment of staff across sectors and better communication with staff from other sectors or agencies. Clearly the opportunities which the teams have provided for members from different sectors to work together has helped them in the day-to-day practice of identifying and meeting needs.

In an attempt to try to facilitate the organisational changes, the management of learning support was revised. We describe the new structure which was introduced below.

Management structure

The most significant change to the management structure was experienced by the area team members, who became responsible to the team leaders. Requests for help from them, however, would most commonly be referred through the headteachers of the schools. The team leaders' line managers were the district senior educational psychologists of Dumfries Burgh, Annandale and Eskdale, and Upper Nithsdale, who might then consult with the adviser (pwld) or with the principal educational psychologist on certain issues.

Several headteachers and team members viewed the management structure as unclear and potentially confusing. Specifically, they were in doubt about how any issues were referred beyond the team leaders, although the implications for them were not particularly significant, because the team leaders were able to resolve most matters themselves. They were concerned also that individual team members, whose line managers were the team leaders but who were responsible to the headteacher of any school whilst working in it, might find themselves in a situation of conflicting loyalties. So far, however, this does not seem to have occurred.

Team members, team leaders and school staff offered no suggestions regarding an alternative line management structure. They did stress, however, the importance of maintaining a level of consistency in the procedures for taking decisions and this had not always been apparent. A few decisions about staffing, for example, had been taken centrally, without consulting even the district senior educational psychologist of the teams concerned. However, uncertainty is bound to occur whenever a new structure is introduced and new areas of responsibility have to be established. Considerable efforts were made at a Regional level to try to clarify the line management for those concerned. These efforts will again be necessary if new area teams are established.

The experiences of the team leaders and the district senior educational psychologists of the line management structure varied across the teams. At its most effective, the team leader and the senior educational psychologist said they worked in close consultation, exchanged ideas and took responsibility for distinctive areas of learning support provision within the team. It appeared less satisfactory when there was less open dialogue and a concern for the risk of encroachment on areas of delineation within the team. There is no easy way to establish new management structures and those involved need to be given time to adjust.

The establishment of any alternatives to the existing line management structure would have to take into consideration the amount of support, particularly in the early stages of the development, which the district senior educational psychologists were able to give to the team leaders. This proved tremendously valuable to them in the first year, since it enabled them to acquire a considerable amount of knowledge and skills. It also allowed them to discuss and take advice on a range of aspects

relating to the teams, for example Record of Needs administration. It is important not to discount the importance for team leaders of having access to someone who is willing to listen. It is vital that future team leaders are assured of access to a similar level of support, even if this were to be provided from a different source.

The proposed structure of the teams, adopted as policy by the Education Committee in December 1988, included a 'promoted post covering significant areas of responsibility' within each team. The posts, designated 'Teacher of the Visiting Services', have not yet been established, but many individuals stated that these would be vital in order to ensure the smooth operation of the teams in the future. It was suggested that if the previous experience of a particular team leader was in secondary education, the promoted post could be allocated to someone with a background in primary education. This would enable them to share some of the responsibilities of the team leaders and, perhaps, to take on a role as co-ordinator for the primary sector. Conversely, if the team leader's previous experience had been gained mainly in primary schools, the appointment of a person from the secondary sector could provide complementary expertise within the team.

Summary

Significant changes were made to the organisation of learning support and to the line management structure. These were thought to have enabled the teams to be more responsive to pupils' learning needs than the previous system. The teams were also viewed as sufficiently flexible to be responsive to changes in these needs. However, there was some uncertainty as to the extent of the flexibility within teams if any fundamental changes to the learning needs were to occur. The approach to meeting needs was thought to have become more co-ordinated since the teams were established. The limited effect which the teams had upon the kind of support provided to schools is in many ways reassuring, given previous satisfaction among headteachers and mainstream staff.

At the front of the report, we make several recommendations regarding the management of learning support. In Section 3 we consider in more detail the role fulfilled by the area team leaders, and the kinds of support they provided to schools and to team members.

3 The responsibilities of the team leaders

The establishment of the post of area team leader was thought by many to have led to considerable improvements in the support available to schools and to team members. Much of this appears to have come about through the kinds of responsibilities which the team leaders have fulfilled and the additional support this enabled them to provide. It is, of course, a role which has evolved throughout the first phase of the area team development. Nevertheless, the experiences of the team leaders so far have been salutary and raise several important questions about how the role of the team leader might develop further. In this section we ask:

- What were the important responsibilities of the area team leaders?
- Were they successful in carrying out these responsibilities? What factors enabled them to be more or less effective?
- What lessons can be learned from the experiences of the existing team leaders which might benefit future team leaders?

We report on the effects headteachers and mainstream staff saw the team leaders as having upon provision for pupils with learning difficulties. We also consider the views of team members on the kinds of support they received from the team leaders. First, however, we examine what team members, mainstream staff and headteachers saw as the important responsibilities of the team leaders.

What responsibilities did the team leaders have?

Most team members, headteachers and many mainstream staff believed that the primary function of the team leaders was to co-ordinate resources within the area teams. However, more than half of the mainstream staff who returned questionnaires said that they they had little or no idea of what the responsibilities of the team leaders were. As we reported in the previous section, the co-ordination of resources within the teams included the deployment of learning support staff as well as dealing with requests for small items of expenditure. There were, however, other functions which the team leaders were expected to fulfil. Table 3.1 compares what the three groups described as the most important responsibilities of the team leaders.

Table 3.1: Most important responsibilities of team leaders

Responsibilities	Area Team Members (N = 57)	Headteachers (N = 14)	Mainstream Staff (N = 45)
Overall co-ordination of learning support	44	13	22
Providing leadership in assertiveness and other personal qualities	40	2	11
Liaising with different agencies	28	11	17
Promoting cohesion and solidarity within the team	21	3	2
Staff development	12	6	5

Before discussing this table it is important to stress that more than half the mainstream teachers who returned questionnaires said they were not clear about the responsibilities of the team leaders.

Many team members and headteachers described the team leaders primarily as co-ordinators rather than managers of the resources. The distinction was based on their observation of the limited autonomy of the team leaders. Whilst they could take many decisions within the team, mainly regarding administrative matters, action on more important aspects, such as on major items of expenditure, required to be sanctioned by the district senior educational psychologists, referred to as their 'line managers'.

Inevitably, the team leaders experienced some difficulties co-ordinating finite resources and had to prioritise needs, which is rarely an easy task. This was a fundamental responsibility of the team leaders. Perhaps more help in this aspect could be provided when team leaders are first appointed, as mentioned in Section 2. Each of the team leaders was given a budget, separate from the staffing allocation, to meet specific needs within the team, such as requests from team members for small items of expenditure. The team leaders would have welcomed clear details of the precise amount of their budget when first appointed, as they felt it would have enhanced their credibility within schools.

A major responsibility of the team leader was to provide support for schools. Mainstream staff, headteachers, team members and the team leaders themselves regarded the team leader as responsible for being available to the schools when help was needed and for assisting them in three main ways:

- discussing general aspects of learning support provision
- providing assistance with specific aspects of learning support provision, eg identifying the needs of one particular child
- making additional staffing or other resources available to the school.

Team members identified the important role of the team leaders within schools as ambassadors for learning support, particularly in heightening awareness among mainstream teachers of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties.

Providing leadership in assertiveness and other personal qualities was regarded by the team members as almost as important as the team leaders' co-ordinating role. Only two headteachers and 11 mainstream staff thought the same, although such qualities are likely to promote a more co-ordinated approach to learning support in their schools. They were more inclined to emphasise the team leaders' role in liaising with different groups across sectors.

We were surprised that fewer than half of the team members saw the promotion of cohesiveness within the team as an important role of the team leaders. It may have been that cohesiveness was not viewed by them as a key factor in providing an effective learning support provision. Alternatively, they might have seen cohesiveness as something which does not develop through explicit action on the part of the team leaders.

The low priority which team members gave to staff development and career reviews is interesting. Team leaders and members whom we interviewed had stressed the fundamental importance of this role. Furthermore, since the advent of the area teams, the team leader had become the main source of staff development for team members. It could be that many of the activities undertaken by the team members, such as those concerned with team specific objectives or team building exercises, were not regarded as relating to their own professional staff development. If this were the case, there might be cause for concern. We have more to say on staff development for team members and mainstream staff later in this section.

To what extent did the team leaders carry out their various responsibilities? We turn to this question now, dealing first with the views of the team members.

Table 3.2: Were the responsibilities of the team leaders carried out?: the views of area team members (N = 57)

	Carried Out?		
Responsibilities	**Yes**	**No**	**Don't Know**
Overall co-ordination of learning support	31	8	5
Providing leadership in assertiveness and other personal qualities	29	7	4
Liaising with different agencies	17	7	4
Promoting cohesion within the team	7	11	3
Staff development	9	3	–

The table indicates that the majority of team members viewed the team leader as being successful in fulfilling the responsibilities which they had identified as the most important, namely the overall co-ordination of learning support and the provision of leadership in assertiveness and other personal qualities. Interestingly, it is in the promotion of cohesion within the team, given a lower priority than other responsibilities by team members, which the largest number of members saw the team leader as being least successful. Perhaps the members' negative experiences of the team building activities have influenced their views on this matter.

Headteachers and mainstream staff were also asked whether they thought the responsibilities of the team leaders which they had identified had been carried out. Table 3.3 indicates their views.

Table 3.3: Were the responsibilities of team leaders carried out?: the views of headteachers and mainstream staff

	Headteachers (N = 14)		Mainstream Staff (N = 45)	
Responsibilities	**Specified**	**Carried Out?**	**Specified**	**Carried Out?**
Overall co-ordination of learning support	13	13	22	15
Providing leadership in assertiveness and other personal qualities	2	2	11	4
Liaising with different agencies	13	11	17	12
Promoting cohesion within the team	3	3	2	2
Staff development	3	3	5	3

The headteachers appear to have been satisfied that the team leaders had fulfilled the responsibilities which they had identified as important, with only two suggesting that the liaison with different agencies, such as speech therapists, had been inadequate. A number of mainstream teachers, on the other hand, did not see the team leader as wholly successful, particularly in co-ordinating support, providing leadership and liaising with particular groups. We suspect that they did not feel that the team leaders had involved them in any significant way, either directly or through team members. This is clearly an area which team leaders could address in the future. It is understandable that in a busy first year of the operation of the teams, headteachers, rather than the generality of mainstream staff, have been targeted by team leaders.

Headteachers and mainstream staff were also asked what the advantages were, in their experience, of having a team leader. Table 3.4 compares their responses.

Table 3.4: Advantages to headteachers and mainstream staff of having a team leader

Advantage	Headteachers (N = 14)	Mainstream Staff (N = 45)
Being accessible if help is needed	11	21
Helping to establish/update school policies for pwld	8	15
Increasing teachers' awareness of pwld	3	6
Providing staff development for learning support staff	9	22
Deploying learning support staff where needs are greatest	10	20
Providing relevant materials/resources to help pwld	7	13

The most important advantage, from the point of view of the headteachers and mainstream staff, was that the team leader was accessible if help was needed. The other aspects which they identified also clearly related to the kinds of support which the team leader provided to the school. Below we look at that support in more detail.

Support for schools

Headteachers of both primary and secondary schools said they had benefited enormously from the establishment of the post of area team leader. They regarded the team leaders as clearly identified individuals whom they could contact if help was needed and who responded quickly and effectively. As well as replying to direct requests for help, the team leaders had established regular, informal contact with many of the headteachers. A number of headteachers welcomed this as it gave them the opportunity to discuss issues of learning support before they became problematic. In our recent research on mainstream provision within the Region, we reported on the uneasy relationship between the educational psychologists and school staff. This seemed to have arisen largely through a mismatch of expectations between the two groups regarding the kind of help which could be provided by the educational psychologists. Several people believed that this had been resolved since the advent of the area teams and there seems to be two main reasons for this.

The more significant related to the team leaders' previous experience as learning support teachers. This was regarded as crucial in enabling curricular issues to be tackled effectively. The team leaders were able to provide practical advice and support on a regular basis, which enabled many difficulties to be resolved at an early stage. Apparently minor pieces of help, such as providing information on learning materials or courses can be crucial. Such information and practical advice made a considerable difference to learning support teachers, particularly peripatetic staff, many of whom no longer felt they were working in isolation with little

support. The willingness of the team leaders to go into classrooms, when assisting in the identification of particular difficulties, appeared to have made school staff more receptive to their advice, because it was more detailed and practical and was based on a knowledge of the pupils' individual learning needs.

Secondly, there is a clearer understanding of the role of the educational psychologists. Much of the improvement in the relationships between the schools and the educational psychologists seems to have emerged from open discussions between the team leaders and the educational psychologists, concerning their own areas of responsibilities within the teams. This varied across the teams, but the importance of addressing these matters was stressed by them. Requests for help relating to other aspects of learning support, such as behavioural or medical difficulties, tended to be passed on by team leaders to the educational psychologists. Teachers saw the educational psychologists as being better equipped to provide help of this nature, rather than on matters relating to the curriculum. The psychologists also appeared satisfied with the shift in the balance of their workload which, in a sense, had reverted to an emphasis on the aspects of learning support for which their initial training had prepared them.

Clearly the team leaders were viewed as effective in the roles they fulfilled within schools. The seniority of their appointment appears to have been an important factor in enabling them to be effective. We consider this in more detail below.

Seniority of the team leaders in schools

The team leaders were appointed at a level which was equivalent to a headteacher of a special school and this level of appointment clearly signalled the importance of good quality provision for pupils with learning difficulties. The seniority of the post could have posed problems of status and authority between team leaders and headteachers. That it has not is partly due to the clear delineation of co-ordination of learning support for the area being the responsibility of the team leaders, while the day-to-day management of learning support in schools is the responsibility of the headteacher. Reference has already been made to the possibility of conflicts of interest if sudden demands were made in the area which adversely affected the deployment of learning support staff to particular schools. One way of enabling the team leaders to be fully aware of the school demands on learning support staff is to include them in the schools' senior management team meetings. All three secondary schools have done this, to the mutual benefit of the schools and the team leaders. The team leaders welcomed this role, as they thought it gave them added status within the school. Clearly it could also introduce a high degree of accountability, requiring the team leader to justify his or her actions in deploying staff in the context of the management of the school. As far as the schools are concerned, it is a way of improving communication with the team leader and provides opportunities to brief him or her on the management's perspective on learning difficulties. Well informed team

leaders are likely to be better placed to argue successfully for increased resources for schools. There is a need for such relationships to be developed sensitively to ensure that existing management structures are not impaired and learning support remains an integral part of schools' provision.

We see many advantages in including the area team leader in the senior management team in the secondary schools. These include:

- raising the profile of learning difficulties and nature of support available
- enhancing lines of communication and accountability between the area team leader and school management
- embedding provision of support for pupils with learning difficulties within the school
- clarifying the status of the area team leader within the secondary school.

The main disadvantage suggested by team members was that the management of learning support was becoming too bureaucratic and hierarchical. A secondary headteacher also questioned the cost effectiveness of certain activities undertaken by the team leader, which had in some cases led to a duplication of effort within the school. No specific example of this was given. The learning support staff, working predominantly in secondary schools, could feel distanced from their own school's senior management. This had clearly not been the intention behind the establishment of the posts of team leaders. However, the concern was expressed in the questionnaire by seven out of 16 area team members who worked mainly in secondary schools and by four out of 29 secondary mainstream teachers. One area team member commented in the questionnaire:

> Removal of responsibility for learning support staff from schools may have been beneficial in the primary sector but has been detrimental to secondary. Senior school management no longer feel "responsible" for us or to us. We are effectively debarred from the Faculty system. Our effectiveness depends on good working relationships within school and this is difficult to sustain unless we are perceived by colleagues and pupils as being part of the school.

Similar concerns were voiced by a secondary mainstream teacher in a promoted post:

> It seems that the effect of the area team structure has been to make more remote the activities of learning support staff in the school. It seems to me that support structures, of whatever kind, work best if they are firmly rooted in the institution they are there to support. It seems possible to develop effective inter-sector links without the imposition of an extra tier of the management structure which often serves to delay and confuse responses.

There is no obvious solution to this problem. All parties concerned, namely, senior management, area team leaders and learning support staff need to evolve their own strategies for dealing with this. Perhaps the team leaders could find ways of keeping secondary mainstream and learning support staff informed of decisions at management level. More general attempts to involve mainstream teachers in school-focused activities might also improve the situation. In our view, however, the worries about distancing learning support staff from senior staff do not undermine the benefits of the area team leaders' membership of the secondary schools' management teams. We turn now to the teaching responsibilities of the team leaders within the primary and secondary schools.

Teaching responsibilities of the team leaders

When the posts of team leader were established, it was agreed that some teaching responsibilities should be included. Details of the amount and nature of these were left to the discretion of each team leader. They tended to be involved in teaching for approximately two or three days per week, although the distribution would vary from time to time. A teaching responsibility was viewed by the team leaders as an important way of building good relationships with staff in the schools and demonstrating their familiarity with curricular matters. It also enabled them to provide learning support to resolve short-term difficulties or to help with the identification of particular problems.

Clearly it is important that the team leaders do not become distanced from the practical aspects of providing learning support. Yet, given the role fulfilled by the team leaders in this context, which is essentially one of an additional learning support teacher, the benefits are likely to be confined to the few schools in which the team leaders teach. Perhaps in the future, consideration could be given to establishing a role which could enable more people to benefit from the team leaders' expertise. It has been suggested, for example, that the team leaders could encourage a high level of consistency across the team by providing models of good practice in the identification and meeting of needs. In this context, the team leaders could provide a kind of tutorial support to members of staff in all schools, perhaps with the assistance of other team members. The ability to respond to temporary needs, such as the emergence of short-term difficulties within a particular school, has proved invaluable and could continue, without necessarily specifying a teaching responsibility within the team leaders' remit.

It was decided that the team leader of the Sanquhar area team should continue to fulfil the role of principal teacher of learning support in Sanquhar Academy. The Region wished to find out if it was feasible to combine both roles. The experiences of the Sanquhar team and its associated schools suggest that this should not occur. It posed enormous difficulties for the individual concerned and for the learning support staff in the school. It placed excessive demands on their time and made team building an extremely arduous task for the team leader. It also confused lines of communication within the team and led to some discontent among

members. In our view, the distinctively different roles of area team leader and principal teacher should not be combined. It is difficult to envisage how a team leader who is forced to reconcile conflicting professional demands can be in the best position to foster team cohesion.

Because of the difficulties created within the Sanquhar team by combining the roles of the team leader and principal teacher, the specific objective which the team had selected could no longer be considered feasible. Later in the report, we discuss the importance which these objectives had for the members of the Lockerbie and Dumfries teams. Before doing so we consider the responsibilities of the team leaders in relation to recorded pupils and staff development.

Record of needs procedures

The team leaders took on varying degrees of administrative work relating to pupils with Record of Needs. This included maintaining the Records, calling (and sometimes chairing) Reviews and monitoring how needs were being met. These aspects were thought to be managed very effectively by the team leaders, mainly because they were dealing with a relatively small case load and often knew the children concerned. This enabled them to make a more detailed contribution.

Each of the team leaders introduced a series of more informal interim review meetings in order to monitor how needs were being met. They involved the parents and other individuals who worked with the children and several people, including parents, found that they provided an excellent opportunity to discuss a child's learning needs. The meetings were seen as complementing the more formal Record of Needs Reviews, which could take place through the submission of reports from various parties, without necessarily seeing the child.

The appropriateness of the team leaders' involvement in the Record of Needs procedures was endorsed by school staff, educational psychologists and the team leaders themselves. It was suggested, however, that this could be shared in the future with school staff. It seems reasonable to expect school staff to take over some of the responsibilities for the administration of Record of Needs. The team leaders could then devote more time to other activities, such as staff development. It could also prove beneficial to the schools to be involved more fully in the process of monitoring how needs are being met.

Staff development

A great deal of the team leaders' time was devoted to providing staff development for members of the team. Many of the activities undertaken by the team, such as discussing the team specific objectives, are bound to contribute to the professional development of the members although they might be unaware of it. The team members we interviewed said they welcomed the focus on specific and identifiable staff development activities. Such initiatives created new opportunities for developing careers in learning support in a more structured way, as well as sharing skills and

knowledge. The range of activities in which the team leaders involved the members are noted below:

- team building exercises
- discussion of the different roles and responsibilities of team members
- activities concerned with particular aspects of learning support, eg consultancy
- programmes of work for specific groups of staff, eg Open University Unit for Children and Young People, undertaken mainly by special needs auxiliaries
- discussion of the selection of the specific objectives of the team
- activities relating to the specific objectives of the team, eg introducing paired reading
- opportunities to attend courses or conferences.

The emphasis on these different areas altered as the teams developed and the needs of the members evolved. Staff development opportunities for special needs auxiliaries had increased and this was viewed by many team members as an important way of recognising their value and their particular requirements. Headteachers welcomed the extensive role of the team leaders in the staff development of learning support staff, as it reduced their own responsibility to make provision, allowing priority to be given to mainstream staff. A number of headteachers also reported that the learning support staff in their schools appeared to have benefited considerably from staff development of this kind. They saw this as having positive effects on school provision. It is interesting that, given all these activities and the positive reports from headteachers, many team members did not see staff development as among the most important responsibilities of the team leader. Perhaps staff were unaware that they were involved in 'professional development'. Alternatively in a busy first year, staff may have seen the co-ordination of team resources as the paramount activity for the team leader. Clearly there are advantages in being able to ease the enormous pressures faced by headteachers. Nevertheless, it is important that this does not result in learning support becoming peripheral to the work of each school, or in learning support staff being denied access to the regular school staff development programme.

There was little evidence of staff development for mainstream staff being provided either by the team leaders or by members of the teams in their own schools. We are aware, from our previous research in the Region, that this has been an important aspect of the learning support teachers' work in the past and crucial in the context of mainstream provision. Inevitably, staff development within the teams took priority whilst they were in the first stages of being established. We were also aware that the timing of the implementation of the area teams did not coincide with the planning of staff development for mainstream teachers. There would be cause for concern if the teams were not able to make a substantial contribution to mainstream staff development programmes in the future since this would create a danger of learning support becoming a marginal aspect of the schools' provision.

What kinds of staff development activities might help to prepare future team leaders? We consider this question briefly in the final part of this section.

Future team leaders

There was complete agreement that the extent of the development of the teams so far owes much to the considerable abilities and efforts of the three team leaders. The previous professional experience of the existing team leaders was largely in the secondary schools, with some management responsibilities as principal teachers. One of the team leaders had significant experience of chairing meetings and liaising with different agencies, which was clearly advantageous. There is no evidence to suggest that a specific background in secondary schools is necessary. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the role of the team leader is demanding and that future incumbents will have to be adaptable and prepared for a variety of new experiences.

Much of the current team leaders' expertise has been acquired through experience and a great deal of trial and error. The existing team leaders could contribute significantly to the staff development of future team leaders, although careful consideration needs to be given as to how this is done. It has been suggested that new team leaders would benefit from spending some time working alongside the three more experienced leaders. This may well be the case, but unless it is structured, providing opportunities to observe, discuss and reflect upon specific aspects of the team leader's role, it might be of restricted value. Furthermore, the existing teams would be at a fairly advanced stage of development and so could not offer the new team leaders the kinds of opportunities which would enable them to understand more complex matters, such as team building. Perhaps the existing team leaders could outline the kinds of staff development experiences which they, in hindsight, might have profited from.

Summary

The responsibilities of the team leaders were varied and included virtually all aspects of learning support. They were viewed as successful in providing support to schools, particularly by headteachers, and the inclusion of team leaders in the senior management teams of the secondary schools was clearly advantageous. An emerging concern is the need to ensure that learning support remains an integral part of the schools' provision. Team leaders could find ways of keeping mainstream teachers informed of management decisions and involving them in school-focused activities.

Team members also benefited from having a team leader, through increased opportunities for staff development and more general support. Much can be learned from the experiences of the existing team leaders which can form the basis for their own staff development and that for future team teachers.

We make a number of recommendations regarding the responsibilities of the team leaders, which are contained at the front of the report. In Section 4, we consider the team approach to learning support provision.

4 The concept of a team

The most innovative feature of the new policy was the establishment of discrete learning support teams. This meant that all teaching and non-teaching learning support staff from a single secondary school, its associated primaries and nursery units, and other peripatetic staff, such as teachers of the hearing impaired, were intended to work together as a team to provide support to schools, pupils and parents.

To establish a group of people as a team is, of course, no guarantee that the members will feel themselves part of it or will function as a unit. It takes a great deal of time to establish a feeling of group solidarity and we are reporting at an early stage of the development of the teams. We will, however, try to identify the factors which promoted and constrained group cohesion. Here we ask:

- What notions did team members have that they were working towards a common purpose? How did these relate to headteachers', mainstream teachers' and parents' understandings of the purposes of the teams?
- How important were factors such as the size and composition?
- What kinds of opportunities were provided for members to reinforce cohesiveness? Were these effective?

We begin by exploring the perceptions team members had of sharing a common purpose.

Perceptions of sharing a common purpose

At one level the main purpose of the teams, to improve learning support provision, was shared by all members. Team members were supportive, in principle, of the introduction of the area teams. Fundamentally, there was a common concern among team members for the welfare of pupils with a range of learning needs and for the ways in which provision for these pupils could be improved through a multidisciplinary approach. In general terms, therefore, there was support for the notion of distinctive area learning teams united by the broad purpose of providing a service which was responsive, flexible and co-ordinated and which had as its primary focus the needs of the individual pupil.

Beyond this, teams set themselves more individual purposes by targeting areas of learning support for improvement, such as inter-sector liaison or extending parental involvement. This seemed to enhance the members' sense of unity through having 'ownership' of the objectives. They provided the members with practical and realistic goals which they could work towards, and which gave them a sense of achievement through their 'team effort'. In the questionnaire, almost all members said they had been involved in some way in activities relating to the team

objectives. It was by no means easy for team leaders to engage all members enthusiastically in particular projects. The approach adopted, one of letting objectives emerge through discussion and debate, thereby promoting team cohesion, is time-consuming and arduous. The teams also had to avoid taking on something that was unrealistic and which was unlikely to bring much success.

The objectives which the teams finally decided on appeared to be realistic. The Dumfries team focused on liaison between primary and secondary schools and specifically opted to try to improve the transfer arrangements for pupils. The team structure clearly presented opportunities for staff from both sectors to work together. The Lockerbie team found it less easy to agree on an objective. The majority of members wanted to improve parental contact, but the educational visitors did not wish to be included in this, as they thought that their own relationships with parents were satisfactory. Instead they decided to try to improve liaison between pre-school and primary school. Several Lockerbie team members suggested that the team had become less cohesive as a result of establishing separate objectives within the team. Perhaps the educational visitors might have been less inclined to pursue a different objective had they been given a strategic role within the team which enabled them to share their expertise regarding parental involvement with other members.

Members of the Sanquhar team had also intended to focus on parental contact. However, we have already highlighted the difficulties faced by the team leader in trying to fulfil the role of team leader and principal teacher of learning support, as well as coping with a number of staff changes within the team. These led the team leader to view the objective as no longer feasible. If circumstances improved, the team leader hoped that members would be able to develop this aspect of learning support provision. In Section 5 we consider in more detail the specific objectives selected by the Dumfries and Lockerbie team members, the related activities undertaken and the extent to which these were thought to have been fulfilled.

One team member described how positive the effects of sharing a common purpose had been:

> I think this is a very pleasant and happy area team - there is no pressure and no stress, no one is left out and everyone knows each other well and contributes. It is a supported group with good interaction and a keen awareness of learning difficulties in education and above all a real caring across the board for all pupils with learning difficulties.

Interestingly, this comment came from a member of the Sanquhar team in which the specific team objective had to be abandoned. There were, therefore, certain conditions in addition to team objectives which, if present, enabled the teams to function effectively and which reinforced the unity of the teams. Of crucial importance were the size and the composition of the teams and the opportunities for members to work together. It is to these we now turn.

Size and composition of the area teams

As we mentioned in Section 2, the size of the teams ranged from approximately 19 to 36. Members of the largest team, Dumfries, believed that it was too large to enable the members to get to know each other during the time devoted to team meetings. On the other hand, although the size of the Sanquhar team had enabled members to develop good relations, it was suggested that they might have benefited from an association with staff from other schools, enabling a greater interchange of ideas.

The membership of the teams included both teaching and non-teaching staff. Members agreed that this was vital if the teams were to achieve the general purposes of providing a responsive, flexible and co-ordinated learning support service. The diversity of interests and needs within the team, however, made the planning of meetings a difficult task. On one hand, it was necessary to ensure that the particular needs of groups, such as the special needs auxiliaries, were given sufficient recognition. On the other hand, to spend considerable time on an issue such as this during team meetings could risk alienating the others. Indeed, many learning support staff found the discussion of the conditions of employment for auxiliaries the least important topic in meetings, mainly because of its irrelevance to them. This is an interesting comment on team cohesion and identity.

Sub-groups were created within one of the teams in an attempt to alleviate such difficulties. This enabled them to discuss issues of particular relevance to them, whilst still working on more common topics as a whole team. It is important, if different groups within the teams are encouraged to pursue divergent topics, that they are given opportunities to feed their experiences back to the teams, rather than work separately. The latter is likely to lead to less cohesiveness within the teams. Indeed, we have already reported that members of the Lockerbie team suggested that they had felt less part of a team since separate objectives had been established for the educational visitors, whose work involved mainly children of pre-school age and their parents.

Location of the teams

Whilst the teams were being established, considerable importance was attached, by Regional officials, to locating the team leaders outwith the secondary schools. They thought it vital to emphasise, particularly to secondary headteachers, the separate nature of the teams. The team leaders, therefore, were based within the Regional Psychological Service, where they had secretarial assistance and access to the district senior educational psychologists. However, one of the team leaders, who was also fulfilling the role of principal teacher of learning support at Sanquhar Academy, found it necessary to spend large amounts of time in the school. She was able to make only a few journeys each week to the base at Closeburn, some thirteen miles away from the Academy.

Team meetings were held in various locations. Originally, these took place in the district bases of the Regional Psychological Services, with a view to communicating messages about the distinctiveness of the teams to schools. The Lockerbie team continued to meet at its district base, but the Dumfries and Sanquhar teams found it more convenient to meet in the secondary schools, which involved less travel for many members. Locational factors were seen by the team leaders and members as having a limited effect upon the cohesiveness of the teams. What they would have welcomed, however, was an established resource base where members could gain access to a range of materials. Below we consider the team meetings in more detail and ask what opportunities for reinforcing team solidarity they provided.

Team meetings

Meetings of the area team members were organised and chaired by the three team leaders, for whom they were the main opportunity for conducting team business and staff development activities. The meetings were held, on average, on a monthly basis and lasted approximately one hour during Planned Activity Time (PAT). Many team members held the view that the timing of the meetings was not ideal. They argued that it provided them with insufficient time to engage in meaningful discussion of substantive issues, since any administrative matters had also to be dealt with during the team meetings. As one team member commented:

> Proceedings are usually brought to an abrupt end because of the time factor. Furthermore, after a day at the chalk face, by no stretch of the imagination could I be described as eager or full of ideas.

Clearly this is a problem which is not faced by learning support staff alone. The team leaders, however, could not see any alternative way of involving staff from learning centres, for whom cover during the day was not available. Several team members took the view that the work of the teams should be considered sufficiently important for such cover to be provided.

The team leaders gave considerable thought to the format of the meetings. All three agreed that as little time as possible should be spent on administrative matters, which could be communicated to members in other ways. Team newsletters were produced to provide members with information about the team, and on general matters such as courses and conferences. Aspects of team business which the team leaders wished to communicate orally usually took up no more than five or ten minutes at the start of meetings.

Initial attempts at trying to develop cohesiveness through team building exercises were abandoned by team leaders in favour of an approach based on the management of change. Through their experience of these activities and their subsequent discussions together, and with the Region's staff tutor, they reached the conclusion that cohesiveness could not be achieved through explicit action on their part and that this might even prove

counter-productive. Our evidence from the questionnaire indicates that team members regarded the team building exercises as by far the least important topic of the meetings. The main reasons they gave for this were that the activities were irrelevant, uninteresting or inconclusive.

The alternative approach adopted by the team leaders was one in which they tried to view the development of cohesiveness as a more gradual process. By allowing groups within the teams to assert themselves from time to time, they hoped that the teams' own dynamic would emerge. They were also advised to emphasise the positive factors within the team and to seek to change gradually the negative aspects, rather than engage in more open confrontation. Evidently this did not prove to be an easy task for the team leaders, who encountered some conflict between groups within the teams. Much of this, however, was based on misunderstandings, for example, between learning support staff in the primary and secondary sectors. These appeared, to some extent, to have been resolved through the opportunities which they had to discuss how their roles and responsibilities differed.

Team members reported that the most important topic of the meetings concerned the various roles and responsibilities of the team members. The sessions devoted to these tended to involve short presentations by individuals in which they described what their work entailed, giving examples of a typical day or week. As well as gaining a wider understanding of the roles and responsibilities of team members, they viewed this topic as enhancing team identity. The team leaders also saw it as a valuable staff development exercise for the members, many of whom had little experience of speaking to a group. The style of presentation, which was essentially didactic, possibly held an additional attraction for the members in that they felt they had learned something, which might not have been the case with discussion of less tangible aspects relating to team building or the team objectives.

Learning support staff in both primary and secondary schools tended to see themselves as having shared professional concerns, that is in the education of pupils from primary through to secondary school. They tended to see any differences between them as potentially complementary, rather than contradictory, although there had been some conflict within the teams. The main difficulty, however, appeared to stem from a lack of understanding of both sectors and the activities relating to the roles and responsibilities of team members enabled these issues to be addressed and, in many cases, resolved.

The professional interests of other team members appeared to be less readily compatible. Certain team members tended to attribute this to the different kinds of professional training they had experienced. Educational visitors, for example, saw themselves as having more in common with educational psychologists than with many of the teaching and non-teaching staff. They also viewed their close links with the families of children, particularly of pre-school age, as particularly important, requiring special knowledge and skills which they did not think were shared by

other team members. Many of the educational visitors felt that this made it difficult for them to feel part of a team.

There was one group in particular, the special needs auxiliaries, with distinctive needs. What opportunities were available for reinforcing their sense of belonging in the team?

Special needs auxiliaries

The unique circumstances of this particular group made the team leaders' task of establishing and maintaining cohesiveness particularly complex. Auxiliaries can feel isolated as they often do not experience the same kinds of support available to teaching staff in schools and staff development opportunities are usually limited. Many of them are employed on a part-time basis. In some respects, the special needs auxiliaries saw themselves as benefiting from the establishment of the area teams. A greater recognition of the contribution they made to meeting pupils' needs made many of them feel valued members of the teams. They also experienced more opportunities for staff development, either alongside other team members or as a discrete group. Nevertheless, there was considerable ill-feeling among several of the special needs auxiliaries which led some of them eventually to elect not to attend team meetings.

The fundamental difficulty for the special needs auxiliaries concerned their contractual arrangements. Payment to them was made on an hourly basis, for the time they were in school; therefore, they had to give up their own time to attend team meetings. Many teachers who wished to participate in the staff development activities within their own school spent more than the allocated PAT and so also gave up some of their own time. Indeed, several special needs auxiliaries indicated that they did not mind attending the meetings, unpaid, if they would benefit from these. Nevertheless, the delay in resolving this issue at a Regional level communicated the message to the auxiliaries that they were valued less than other members of the teams. One auxiliary summed up the sentiments of her colleagues:

> I am paid hourly to 3.30 pm, with no overtime available, no PAT to give up unlike teachers and no directive as to the implementation of the time in lieu arrangement given or likely to be so after some 10 months. I therefore felt my attendance at meetings was given little or no concern, urgency or importance and with low self-esteem and self-worth as to my part in the team withdrew my attendance. To date, some 5 months later, the position has not changed...I feel very strongly that this problem should be resolved before any other auxiliaries in future teams are left to feel as worthless as myself.

Their concerns were shared by other team members, as this comment from a learning support teacher illustrates:

> The auxiliaries are essential to the team and should be integral to it but their voice, status and remuneration all leave much to be desired. The fact of their non-payment for attendance at team meetings says it all.

One learning support teacher made it clear that the auxiliaries' decision not to attend the team meetings seriously impaired the members' capacity to function as a team:

> This has resulted in a teachers only team. This is not a constructive situation and is certainly not helpful in building up good personal working relationships within the team. Nor does it foster the idea that all members of the team are valued, with skills and expertise that are important to the team providing learning support.

The team leaders had attempted to explore ways of 'paying back' the time spent in team meetings, but both groups found this unsatisfactory. The Region is, however, currently exploring ways of improving the pay and conditions of special needs auxiliaries. The changes being considered include an upgrading to nursery nurse level, payment for PAT and the provision of a training package. We welcome these plans as a positive endorsement of the value of special needs auxiliaries and promoting greater cohesiveness within teams.

Many of the auxiliaries who continued to attend team meetings did not regard their experiences very positively. One of the major difficulties they faced was a lack of self-confidence and it seems that there was not adequate recognition of this, for example in trying to encourage a contribution from them. One auxiliary commented:

> When I did go to the team meetings I found most of them tedious...I was not able to participate very fully in some discussions as really what does my opinion matter when classroom practice is discussed. To some (not all) I am there as a passive onlooker and my opinion is irrelevant.

A number of auxiliaries saw the team meetings as tending to be oriented towards the teaching staff. Consequently, when asked to identify the topics which were most important to them, many of the auxiliaries who returned the questionnaires referred to the meetings generally as unimportant to them. The reasons they gave were that they found them irrelevant, uninteresting or felt that they had little to contribute to the discussion. The team objectives were identified as unimportant, mainly for the same reasons.

This evidence is possibly more worrying than the concerns over their conditions of employment, the latter appearing to be more amenable to resolution. The extent to which cohesiveness develops is bound to be

limited if there is insufficient understanding of the different needs of team members, who might be finding it difficult to adapt to working relationships which are unusual and, perhaps, uncomfortable. This is clearly an important area for further development. It is important not to expect too much, too soon, but feelings of alienation from the team have to be tackled quickly. In this context, it is important to note the more positive response of Sanquhar auxiliaries to team membership. They indicated in the questionnaire that they were made to feel that their views were being sought and valued. It is difficult to ascertain whether this could be attributed to the smaller size of the team or to the leadership qualities of the team leader. In either case, the outcome made an important contribution to the general unity of the Sanquhar team.

Clients' views of the purposes of the teams

The majority of mainstream staff knew of the establishment of the area teams. They were, however, largely unaware of the structure of the teams, their purposes and activities. As one mainstream teacher commented:

> My "association" with the team is tenuous, to say the least. Is there a distinction between our L D department and the "area team"? I'm afraid I am unaware of what, precisely, that is.

Many of the mainstream staff expressed their dissatisfaction at the lack of information they had received about the area teams. They felt that they should have received some indication, either in writing or orally, of what they might expect from this new initiative, particularly since it had received such a high profile within the Region over recent months. Prior to the establishment of the teams, information about the aims of the area teams and the timing of the first phase had been sent to staff in all schools. It seemed, however, that mainstream teachers were most eager to know how, if at all, individual teams would affect learning support provision in their own schools. In this respect, short presentations or papers, outlining the aims and activities of individual teams would have done a great deal to foster positive relations between the area teams and mainstream staff in the associated schools. This is something for new teams to bear in mind.

Mainstream staff and headteachers were asked in the questionnaires to identify what they regarded as the three or four most important purposes of the area teams and whether, in their opinion, these had been achieved. Table 4.1 below indicates the purposes which they identified as important.

Table 4.1: Purposes of area teams: headteachers and mainstream teachers' views

Purposes	Headteachers	Mainstream Staff
Provide support to mainstream staff in classroom	10	17
Provide co-ordinated approach to learning support across sectors	10	28
Provide relevant materials/resources for pwld	7	14
Consultation	6	10
Improve provision for pwld	3	3

Most of the headteachers and mainstream staff who identified these as important purposes said they had been achieved. However, six mainstream teachers thought that the teams had not provided a co-ordinated approach to learning support across school and five said they had been unsuccessful in providing relevant materials or resources.

The relationship between the area teams and mainstream staff in the associated schools seems to us to merit considerably more attention than it has received so far. Clearly, the concentration of the efforts of both the team leaders and members **within** the teams has paid enormous dividends in developing cohesiveness and highlighting areas of difficulty to be addressed in the future. It would be a pity, however, if this were to be at the expense of the good relationships which have existed between learning support staff and mainstream staff over recent years, making learning support an integral part of mainstream school provision. We have already reported, in Section 3, the concerns among some mainstream staff and headteachers that learning support might have become distanced from the school as a result of changes in the location of responsibility. It is essential that the area team members are enabled to sustain the valuable relationships they have built up with their mainstream colleagues.

We interviewed six parents of pupils attending schools within the area teams. They were selected by the team leaders on the basis of having had some recent contact with the area teams in some form or another. Most of the parents interviewed were not aware of the establishment of the area teams or that any aspects of learning support had altered. Their main contact had continued to be with the learning support teacher in their child's school. In one case, the area team leader had been in contact with a parent in the capacity of a learning support teacher. The parent concerned was unaware of any further responsibilities the team leader might have had.

The small number of parents interviewed were, on the whole, satisfied with learning support provision, prior to and following, the establishment of the area teams. One parent indicated that since the area team leader had

been appointed, there had been better recognition of her son's needs, since the team leader had taken a special interest in the case. The parent believed that the educational psychologist, who had previously been involved in the assessment of the child, had been unwilling to recognise his difficulties. The parent did not think that provision for her son had improved, however, as she was in favour of extraction, rather than mainstreaming, to meet his needs. One parent had been involved in a paired reading scheme, which had been introduced as the Lockerbie team's specific objective.

Summary

It takes a great deal of time for a team to develop and for members to feel part of it. The identification of team objectives can promote unity, but other factors, such as the size and composition of the team, are also important. Team meetings provided opportunities to reinforce cohesion. Sessions devoted to the roles and responsibilities of team members were viewed as more successful than team building exercises in this respect.

The conditions of employment of the special needs auxiliaries made it particularly difficult for them to feel part of the team. The Region, however, are taking action on this. The lack of awareness among mainstream staff as to the purposes of the teams is a source of concern. This could be addressed by providing information to mainstream staff, in the form of papers or short presentations, on the work of individual teams.

Recommendations, relating to the concept of the team, are contained at the front of the report. In the final section, we consider the specific objectives identified by the teams.

5 Team objectives

The area teams were established with the overall purpose of providing a learning support service which was responsive, flexible and co-ordinated. They were encouraged also to target a particular aspect of learning support which might be improved. In Section 4 we reported how this process helped, in some ways, to promote the idea of a team in Dumfries and Lockerbie. In this section we describe the aspects targeted by the teams, the specific objectives and the activities undertaken by members. Given the short time the teams have been in existence, we did not anticipate any dramatic changes, but we consider their progress so far. We begin with the area selected by the Dumfries members, to improve liaison between primary and secondary schools.

Dumfries

The aspect of learning support which the Dumfries team members targeted for improvement was the liaison between primary and secondary schools, to try to meet pupils' needs more effectively. Specifically, their main objectives were:

- to improve the transfer arrangements for pupils from P7 to S1
- to increase members' awareness of the roles and responsibilities of staff working in different sectors.

These objectives were viewed by the majority of members as important and worthwhile.

Activities related to inter-sector liaison

A senior teacher of learning support from Dumfries High School was given specific responsibility for co-ordinating the liaison between primary and secondary schools, with a time allocation of just under three hours per week. A range of activities were undertaken, including:

- visits to primary schools
- organisation of pupil induction visits
- distribution of questionnaires to P7 and S1 pupils and their parents
- participation in the planning and presentation of staff development sessions on primary-secondary liaison
- investigating possibilities for screening more able pupils in primary schools.

The teacher collaborated with a mainstream teacher, involved in related studies, to develop questionnaires for pupils and their parents. One questionnaire was distributed to P7 pupils, in which they were asked about their expectations of secondary school. A second questionnaire,

distributed after they had transferred to S1, focused on their actual experiences. The views of their parents were also sought at both stages.

Primary learning support staff were encouraged to participate in the induction days, when P7 pupils visited the secondary school in preparation for transfer. This provided them with opportunities to observe secondary learning support staff working with subject departments. The feedback obtained from the primary teachers by the team leader was very positive.

Team members were involved in other, more general activities, which were aimed at improving liaison between primary and secondary schools. For example, sessions held during team meetings on the roles and responsibilities of members working in different sectors were regarded as particularly helpful in this respect. There were also more general sessions devoted to primary-secondary liaison. We asked all team members about their involvement in these activities and Table 5.1 below indicates their responses.

Table 5.1: Involvement of Dumfries team members in activities related to inter-sector liaison

Activities	Number of Team Members Involved (N = 24)
Not involved	5
Sessions during team meetings on the roles of team members	15
Sessions during team meetings on inter-sector liaison	11
Pupil induction days	10
Working in different sectors	1

We also asked headteachers and mainstream staff if they had been involved in activities as part of the team's attempt to improve inter-sector liaison for pupils with learning difficulties. The most striking feature of their responses is their lack of any significant involvement, as Table 5.2 below reveals.

Table 5.2: Involvement of Dumfries headteachers and mainstream staff in activities related to inter-sector liaison

Activities	Numbers involved	
	Headteachers N = 7	Mainstream staff N = 16
Not involved	4	12
Working with staff from different sectors	1	1
Staff development sessions on the roles of staff in each sector	1	-
Staff development session on inter-sector liaison	-	-
Pupil induction days	2	3
Other	-	1

Clearly the team was still at a very early stage of development and the priority was to involve team members. Nevertheless, the importance of involving mainstream staff should not be underestimated if they are to be encouraged to be supportive of the team's efforts and significant improvements achieved. Better primary-secondary liaison for pupils with learning difficulties will inevitably involve primary and secondary mainstream teachers as well as learning support staff.

Members of the area learning teams saw a need to extend the existing links between primary and secondary schools, through more cross-sector activities, including shadowing. Greater flexibility was viewed as necessary in order to achieve this. Many also highlighted the need to improve links with mainstream staff, by becoming involved in their staff development activities and serving on working groups relating to major initiatives, such as the 5-14 programme.

Outcomes

It was too early for the team members to provide us with any 'hard' evidence which indicated whether there had been improvements in primary-secondary liaison. However, the team leader obtained feedback from individual members following many of the activities. For example, the primary learning support teachers were asked to comment on how valuable they found the pupil induction days. It is important that teams find ways of looking for evidence which indicates if their objectives have been achieved.

We tried to find out whether staff thought there had been any improvements so far. Only six out of 24 Dumfries team members identified improvement so far. These were:

- heightened awareness among members of each sector's work
- better relationships within the team
- better exchange of information between sector
- better understanding of inter-sector liaison.

Members were fairly general about the role the team had played in these improvements, suggesting individuals' specific allocation of time to it or the team meetings devoted to it as factors promoting success. Lack of time or resources or the size of the team were the main reasons given for a lack of improvement to inter-sector liaison.

We also asked headteachers and mainstream staff from Dumfries High School and its associated primary schools, for their views on improvements in primary-secondary liaison. Most headteachers thought that inter-sector liaison had improved, mainly through better communication between sectors. Primary headteachers said that staff in secondary schools had developed a heightened awareness of them. However, only two out of 16 mainstream teachers were under the impression that improvements had taken place.

Lockerbie

The Lockerbie members found it difficult to agree on one particular aspect of provision to target for improvement. The team leader, therefore, decided to allow two groups to pursue two distinctive areas. The majority of team members were associated with attempts to improve parental contact. Specifically, they identified two main objectives:

- to target parents with little previous involvement with the school
- to introduce paired reading activities.

The small group of educational visitors focused on inter-sector liaison, with the specific objective of improving the transfer arrangements between pre-school and primary school. We will report on the two aspects separately, beginning with parental contact.

Activities related to parental contact

A paired reading scheme was introduced by the team leader in a few schools, with the aim of extending this in the future. Parents were invited to their child's school and were shown a video and given general guidelines on paired reading. The main advice to parents was to provide a relaxed and supportive atmosphere for the child to read. They were asked to help their child for around ten minutes on four or five evenings each week, using the approach they had been shown, and to report on progress.

Members were involved in a range of other activities aimed at improving parental contact. Specific attempts were made by some team members to contact parents who had little previous contact with the school, either through home visits, or by inviting them to the school. Additionally, meetings were held with parents, to try to improve existing links and sessions devoted to improving parental contact were held during team meetings.

Table 5.3 below indicates the involvement in activities relating to parental contact which team members reported in the questionnaires.

Table 5.3: Involvement of Lockerbie team members in activities related to parental contact

Activities	Number of Team Members Involved (N = 18)
Not involved	6
Sessions in team meetings on parental contact	5
Meetings with parents	6
Contacting parents with few previous links with the school	5
Introducing paired reading to parents	1

In one school where paired reading was introduced, the headteacher was asked by the team leader to be involved in the presentation to the parents. Clearly there are advantages in doing this, as it could communicate to

parents, school staff and team members, the importance of a collaborative approach. Table 5.4 indicates the involvement of mainstream staff and headteachers in activities related to parental contact.

Table 5.4: Involvement of Lockerbie headteachers and mainstream staff in activities related to parental contact

Activities	Numbers involved	
	Headteachers N = 6	Mainstream Staff N = 16
Not involved	4	12
Paired reading activities	1	3
Staff development sessions on parental contact	-	-
Meetings with parents	2	1
Contacting parents with few previous links with school	2	2

Team members made a number of suggestions regarding other activities which might improve parental contact. As well as more regular and frequent meetings with parents, both in the home and the school, parents could be invited to become involved in the classrooms. It was also thought that the paired reading activities could be extended to include mainstream staff in future.

Outcomes

It was thought generally that it was too early to look for evidence in the form of improvement in pupils' reading. However, the team leader and individual members intend to continue to monitor pupils' progress. The main positive outcome so far, identified by seven out of 18 team members, had been better relationships with parents. Some said these had become more informal and relaxed. Others reported that some new contact with parents had been established while existing contact with others had become more regular.

A few team members said their classroom practice had been affected as a consequence of the focus on parental contact. One member had benefited from a much deeper understanding of particular pupils from discussions with parents, while another had become more sympathetic, tolerant and helpful to children through an enhanced awareness of their needs or home circumstances.

An improvement in parental contact had been noticed by only one out of six Lockerbie headteachers who returned questionnaires, although two of the headteacher members of the steering group whom we interviewed also said that there had been improvements. Lack of time or resources was said by some to have acted as a barrier while others said that parental contact was already satisfactory. As far as mainstream staff were concerned, only one out of 16 had noticed any improvement, suggesting that lack of time or resources were the main reasons for this.

One parent whom we interviewed had been involved in paired reading which had been introduced by the area team leader. He had been shown the video and given guidelines on the most appropriate kind of support to give his child. The parent found both very clear and helpful. Consequently, he felt confident that he knew how to provide the correct kind of help at home and had become aware of the importance of cultivating a relaxed and positive attitude towards the child. The parent had noticed a considerable improvement in the child's reading as a result.

We turn now to the second of the Lockerbie team's objectives, inter-sector liaison.

Activities related to inter-sector liaison

We have no evidence of specific activities undertaken by the educational visitors aimed at improving liaison between pre-school and primary school. However, some of the team's more general activities, particularly in team meetings, related to this aspect of learning support, as Table 5.5 below indicates.

Table 5.5: Involvement of Lockerbie team members in activities related to inter-sector liaison

Activities	Number of Team Members Involved (N =18)
Not involved	5
Sessions in team meetings on the roles of team members	2
Sessions in team meetings on inter-sector liaison	-
Pupil induction days	2
Working in different sectors	5

Outcomes

We did not obtain any evidence which indicated whether there had been any improvements in the liaison between the primary and pre-school sectors, but it may have been too early for this to emerge, given the small number of people involved.

Sanquhar's special circumstances

The original intention, within the Sanquhar team, had been to try to improve contact with parents. However, the Region's decision not to replace the principal teacher of learning support of Sanquhar Academy, who had been appointed as team leader led to considerable pressures on her as she had to fulfil two roles, and on the team members. As a result, the team leader decided that priority had to be given to more pressing day-to-day demands. Within the team, the main priority was to co-ordinate learning support, which included deploying staff and providing support to schools and team members. As far as the role of principal teacher was

concerned, maintaining the running of the learning support department and continuing to provide support to mainstream teachers were also important priorities. The decision not to add to these demands seemed to us to be a sensible and realistic judgement about what could be achieved, as a lack of success in parental contact might have been detrimental to the team. Any significant improvement in the circumstances within the team would, however, enable them to undertake activities related to parental contact.

Summary

We see considerable advantages for teams in targeting areas for improvement and identifying realistic objectives. These can enhance cohesiveness, through having a sense of ownership of the objectives and working together on related activities. Nevertheless, it is important that the process is viewed as worthwhile, both by the members and the school staff with whom they work and produces tangible achievements.

To sum up, teams should:

- target aspects of learning support for improvement
- identify specific objectives which are realistic and attainable
- plan and carry out activities which involve team members and, wherever possible, school staff
- look for evidence which might indicate if the objectives have been achieved.

The team leaders and steering group members are important sources of guidance and support throughout this process. It is essential, also, that they discourage members from expecting dramatic results in the specific area which has been targeted.

A full list of recommendations, based on our findings, is contained at the front of the report.

6 The team members in the classroom

We have reported on the limited extent to which the area learning teams have affected classroom practice. This was, in many ways, reassuring, as learning support staff were viewed as effective before the introduction of area learning teams. We were interested, also, in what went on within the classroom, and how learning support and mainstream staff established co-operative teaching relationships to provide support for pupils with learning difficulties. Specifically, we wished to find out:

- How did learning support teachers and class teachers decide who was in need of help within the classroom? Was this a once and for all procedure, or were pupils targeted for support on a short-term basis or in particular areas of the curriculum?
- Once the target pupils had been identified, how did both teachers plan their approach to co-operative teaching?
- What kind of curriculum did the pupils with learning difficulties experience? Did this affect the kinds of support they received?
- In what ways did the staff see the support received through co-operative teaching as effective? What factors were viewed as enabling or limiting the effectiveness of co-operative teaching?

In our previous work on mainstream provision for pupils with learning difficulties (Allan, Brown and Munn, 1991) we reported on how teachers tried to develop a variety of co-operative teaching relationships. These ranged from an approach in which learning support teachers provided support to a few pupils with learning difficulties to a more equal partnership where both teachers shared in the planning and teaching of lessons. Our evidence, however, was based mainly on interview data, which has some limitations, because it is often extremely difficult to get teachers to talk about their classroom actions, normally carried out routinely and spontaneously. We saw a need to explore co-operative teaching through a more systematic observation of classroom practice. This enabled us to obtain concrete examples of teachers working together and to invite them to comment on particular events which had occurred in our presence.

We selected two primary and two secondary classes within the area teams for the observation, which was carried out in the month of June 1991. This was not the most convenient time, particularly for the secondary schools, which had moved into a new school year. In the two secondary classes we observed, the pupils were relatively unknown to the subject teachers and the co-operative teaching relationships were newly established. However, this situation was advantageous for us since we were able to observe how the staff decided which pupils were in need of additional support and how they planned and developed their co-operative

teaching approach in the early stages. Details of the classes observed are in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Classes Observed

Class observed	Area Team	Subject
P3	Dumfries	Language work
P4/5	Sanquhar	Maths
S2	Sanquhar	English
S2	Lockerbie	Maths

Our approach to the observation was to focus on a small number of pupils whom the class teacher and the learning support teacher identified as needing additional support. We interviewed each of the teachers separately before the observation, which enabled us to find out if they had identified the **same** target pupils. Each of the classes was observed for a total of approximately four hours, spread over three or four sessions. After every observation period we asked the teachers to tell us what they could about their contact with any of the target pupils. In some instances the class teacher had little or no contact with the pupils concerned and so there was little to discuss. In general, the learning support teachers, who had more frequent and regular contact with the target pupils, were interviewed for longer periods.

Target pupils

There was agreement, among secondary mainstream and learning support staff, that approximately twenty per cent of pupils had some kind of learning difficulty or other, in line with the figure suggested by Warnock (1978). There were thought to be as much as fifty per cent in the primary classes. Some of these pupils, particularly in the primary classes, had difficulties which staff expected to be overcome, while others had more enduring problems. When we asked teachers to identify which pupils in the class had difficulties, we anticipated that they would select those most in need of additional support, and whose difficulties were enduring. Their difficulties, as described by the teachers, are reported below.

Primary 3 class

Six pupils had been identified by both the class teacher and the learning support teacher as being in need of extra help with language work and none of them was recorded. Unusually, they were a mixed ability group and had been targeted for intensive help from the learning support teacher, who was to work only with them over a few weeks. Some of these pupils had short-term difficulties, for example, one pupil had recently moved from England and was found to have writing difficulties, particularly in sentence construction. However, it was expected that these would be resolved through the extra help provided. Two pupils in the group were regarded as having minor difficulties in language, but

were expected to benefit from additional, intensive help in language. The remaining three pupils had enduring difficulties in language, which had been identified by previous class teachers and the learning support teacher. There was still some optimism, however, that their difficulties might also be alleviated. A few pupils who were not part of the group were viewed also as having pronounced learning difficulties in language. They were expected to receive help from the class teacher in the same way as the generality of the class. The class teacher preferred to target a mixed ability group in this way, in the hope of avoiding labelling pupils with learning difficulties as a distinct group within the class. The six target pupils were normally seated apart, but were brought together whilst the learning support teacher was in the class.

Primary 4/5 class

Both teachers identified the same four target pupils, all of whom were regarded as having enduring cognitive difficulties. The pupils had been identified by previous class teachers and the learning support teacher. Two of the pupils, said to have difficulties in both language and maths, were in the process of being recorded and both teachers described one of them as also having poor concentration. The remaining two pupils had less pronounced difficulties. Both teachers identified one as having difficulties in language, but not in maths, and the other as being poor in maths with additional emotional difficulties. The learning support teacher was in the class when the pupils were doing maths, but also extracted three of the pupils for language work. The pupils were seated together.

S2 English class

The mainstream teacher had only recently taken over the class, and so declined to identify any of the pupils as having learning difficulties at the outset. The learning support teacher, on the other hand, who had been involved with the class previously, identified four pupils as being generally slow, but did not communicate this to the mainstream teacher, who preferred to give all pupils a 'fresh start'. One pupil was described as poor in spelling, reading and concentration, with additional behaviour difficulties. Two of the pupils were reported also to have writing difficulties. By the end of the observation period, both teachers were in agreement that there were four target pupils. None of the pupils were recorded. The pupils were normally seated apart.

S2 Maths class

This class was also new to the mainstream teacher, but not to the learning support teacher, who identified four target pupils, and informed the class teacher about their difficulties. One pupil had behavioural problems as well as difficulties in maths. Another, who was recorded, had visual impairment, but did not have significant difficulties in maths. The remaining two pupils were described by the learning support teacher and the class teacher as having general low ability. The pupils were seated apart throughout the lessons.

The main purpose of co-operative teaching was to ensure that those pupils most in need of additional support received it within the classroom. However, staff stressed the importance of trying to avoid labelling the pupils as a consequence. For instance, a pupil receiving help only from the learning support teacher might become distanced from the class teacher and the other pupils. One way of minimising this could be for mainstream and learning support staff to plan jointly their approaches to co-operative teaching. There were, however, limited opportunities for planning of this kind, as we discuss below.

Planning Co-operative Teaching

As far as the primary classes were concerned, the learning support staff and the classroom teachers had worked together before. The co-operative teaching relationships of the secondary staff, on the other hand, were newly established and the teachers concerned expressed some uncertainty as to how these would develop.

In both of the primary schools the learning support teachers had previously tended to provide support within the classroom for maths and to extract a few children for language work. In one of the schools, however, following discussions with the mainstream staff, it had been agreed that the learning support teacher would focus on language within the classrooms. The two secondary learning support teachers had offered their support to the teachers of the classes concerned, apparently because of the enduring difficulties experienced by some of the pupils, and this had been accepted. Our previous work on co-operative teaching suggests that it is not always easy for learning support teachers, particularly in secondary schools to gain access to subject departments or to approach individual teachers. In this case, however, all four mainstream teachers appeared to welcome the provision of learning support in their classroom.

Although some consultation time was set aside for staff to plan their approach to co-operative teaching beforehand, this was rarely used by primary or secondary staff, because of other demands within the school, subject departments or on the teacher's individual preparation time. Discussions about the lessons or the pupils, therefore, tended to take place more informally, in the staffroom or the corridor. One primary learning support teacher suggested that consultation time was often the first thing to be 'squeezed out' during times of pressure because:

> There's still this feeling that a learning support teacher or any teacher for that matter has to be teaching all the time...I haven't quite got it over yet that an important part is also the consultation, planning and discussion. That is not allowed for and so you're cramming it in or stealing it from other times.

A secondary learning support teacher, on the other hand, suggested that it was the mainstream teachers' close familiarity with their own subject matter, which made them reluctant to spend their time on consultation:

> One of the things with them is that they are experts in their subject and they can just do a lesson off the cuff...all the same I'd like to know what they're doing, so that I could have something ready. I don't want to make life more difficult for the teacher by saying "You've got to tell me what you're going to be doing in ten days time so that I can prepare a worksheet" That's just bothering them and bullying them.

This teacher was clearly in a dilemma, since the lack of consultation limited the effectiveness of learning support, for example in being able to contribute to the department's curriculum materials, yet to try to encourage mainstream staff to consult more regularly might have proved more detrimental to their working relationship. Mainstream staff tended to see consultation time as something which could be used only if necessary, for example, to discuss the work of a particular pupil, rather than as an integral part of their own planning and development.

When the staff did consult, either formally or informally, they most usually discussed the pupils' individual needs and the content to be covered. It appeared that there was little discussion of co-operative teaching strategies, although how the two teachers were going to work together was clearly important to them. One learning support teacher speculated on how the newly established co-operative teaching relationship might develop:

> I certainly didn't want any kind of high profile, although I will later on, once we've established something between us that's acceptable...It should work fine and should have quite a bit of shared activity. With some teachers you have to have a different role. It's shared but you do different things. In other instances you're virtually interchangeable and I think this will probably develop a bit like that.

Headteachers and other senior staff have recognised the importance of consultation between mainstream and learning support by allocating time for this. Nevertheless, it is understandable that it assumes a low priority for mainstream staff. Perhaps one way in which senior management could safeguard consultation time could be to ask for tangible evidence of this to be produced, in the form of development plans. This might also encourage staff to plan more precisely their approaches to co-operative teaching.

Before exploring the kinds of support received by the target pupils through co-operative teaching, it is important to consider the work which they were asked to do, and the extent to which this was viewed as part of the mainstream curriculum, experienced by the generality of pupils, or formed a more distinctive, special curriculum. Clearly, the curriculum and the support received by pupils are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity we shall consider each of these aspects separately, beginning with the curriculum which the target pupils experienced in the classroom.

The curriculum experienced by the target pupils

In only one of the four classes we observed, the primary 3 class, were specific attempts being made to remedy the difficulties of the target pupils, through giving them intensive work on language, their area of difficulty. The aim was to help the pupils to 'catch up' in order that they might, at a later stage, experience the same mainstream curriculum as their peers. Both the learning support teacher and the class teacher were optimistic that this would occur. As far as the other classes were concerned, staff did not think it was realistic to try to resolve the enduring difficulties of the target pupils. Instead, the work which the pupils were given deliberately placed less emphasis on fundamental areas of weakness, such as reading. For example, in the secondary classes, the level L materials of the Kent Mathematics programme and a worksheet, used in English, both demanded a lower level of reading than that required by the rest of the class. These pupils experienced a version of the mainstream curriculum, which took account of difficulties, such as reading and comprehension, but which did not attempt to resolve them. We consider in more detail the educational experiences of the target pupils in each of the classes below, beginning with the primary 3 pupils.

The target pupils in the primary 3 class were taught a separate lesson in language by the learning support teacher, but this was related to the general theme of footwear on which the whole class had previously been working. Specifically, the target pupils were involved in a piece of writing, in which they had to imagine themselves as an item of footwear. They were encouraged to make use of word cards which had been provided, to assist them with spelling, although they tended to ask the learning support teacher or each other if they were stuck. The pupils were also asked to write a poem using the computer concept keyboard, collect information about the footwear of their peers and present this in the form of a pie chart. The learning support teacher, by working intensively with the pupils in this way, aimed to improve their language abilities and to encourage them to produce a greater amount of written work, using an extended range of vocabulary, than had previously been the case. The language work which the pupils did was not specialised in any way, but was more concentrated, because of the increased amount of contact with a teacher. Ultimately, it was hoped that the additional support would equip at least some of them to cope with the same mainstream curriculum as their peers.

Two of the target pupils in the primary 4/5 class had previously been working on Ginn materials, aimed specifically at pupils with learning difficulties. They had been making good progress and the class teacher transferred them onto the SPMG materials used by their peers. They were expected to progress at their own pace, although they would always be considerably further behind their peers. The difficulties of the two other pupils were such that the teachers thought they needed to be given work which had been specially prepared for them, usually by the class teacher. Sometimes the class teacher gave the whole class examples from the Ginn

materials to complement the SPMG materials and to counteract any of the inherent weaknesses of the materials. For example, fractions were thought to be more adequately covered in the Ginn, than in the SPMG materials. The class teacher also saw the interchange of materials in this way as reinforcing the notion of a mainstream curriculum.

The target pupils of the S2 maths class worked at various stages of the Kent Mathematics materials, on the L levels, prepared especially for pupils with learning difficulties. The pupils worked through an individualised matrix in the same way as their peers. As well as introducing mathematical concepts at a less complex level, the L levels of materials required considerably less reading from the pupils. The entire class, including the target pupils, was taught one traditional lesson each week by the mainstream teacher, but we did not observe this.

The work of the S2 English class centred mainly on the reading and comprehension of a novel. The actual reading was carried out mainly as a class activity, with some recapitulation of the story either by the class teacher or the learning support teacher. There were also opportunities for all pupils to practise reading in pairs or in small groups, mainly to allow the class teacher to assess their reading abilities. A worksheet, which tested the pupils' comprehension of the novel, had been prepared and revised by the class teacher and the learning support teacher had compiled an additional version for the target pupils. Because of the lack of opportunities for joint planning, however, they had undertaken this separately. There were many similarities between the two versions, for example both teachers had tried to reduce the amount of text which had been contained in the original version and had supplied some of the vocabulary from the novel. However, whilst the worksheet produced for the target pupils had less density of text, and was therefore easier to read, in some ways it was more difficult than the one provided for the generality of pupils. This was because the target pupils were required either to remember particular episodes in order to answer the questions, or to be able to skim read large amounts of text. The rest of the class, on the other hand, had been supplied with the page numbers and so could locate specific events within the novel more easily.

It is interesting to speculate whether this had occurred merely through lack of time for joint planning, or whether it reflected more fundamental differences in the teachers' views of the tasks which were appropriate for pupils with learning difficulties and for the generality of pupils. When we discussed the two versions of the worksheet with the two teachers, they did appear to have different priorities, particularly as far as the target pupils were concerned. In this instance, it does seem that prior planning might, at least, have given the two teachers the opportunity to share these views. Below we consider the kinds of support which the target pupils received within the classroom.

Support received by the target pupils

Most of the support received by the target pupils came from the learning support teachers. It was not distinctively different from that which would normally be provided by the class teacher, but was more intensive, with more frequent interactions. The overall purpose of co-operative teaching, in the four classes we observed, was to enable the learning support teacher to provide additional help to those experiencing difficulty. Beyond this, there was little indication that the teachers shared other aspects of the planning and teaching of lessons. In the two secondary classes, the learning support teachers either supervised the work which had been set by the class teacher or did corrections. A similar arrangement was evident in the primary 4/5 class, but not in the primary 3 class, in which the target pupils were taught as a separate group by the learning support teacher. In this case, the teacher was trying to help the pupils to catch up, in the hope that they would be able to cope with the mainstream curriculum later on, but she had not adopted any specialised teaching approaches. The primary 4/5 learning support teacher described the typical help which was provided:

> I was just verifying that it was right, giving her the instructions at the beginning, double checking, because the instructions were: 1 - she had to line off the diagram, according to the squares. 2 - she had to colour all the whole squares yellow. 3 - she had to leave the half squares blank and 4 - she had to find the area. So there was a lot in that for her. One telling and probably she would have two or three of the things but she'd have either coloured everything or coloured the ones with the half squares instead of the ones with the whole squares and not colouring the halves.

If a pupil had finished the work, the learning support teacher sometimes set additional tasks. These usually provided extra practice or kept the pupil occupied, rather than introducing something new.

With the exception of the primary 3 class, it was the mainstream teachers who decided on the curriculum for all pupils and the learning support teachers who helped the pupils to cope with the demands of the work. This was not ideal, as far as the learning support teachers were concerned, and they sometimes thought that the pupils they were supporting had been given unreasonable tasks. After one such instance, a learning support teacher said she had simply been telling the pupils what to write, otherwise they would have failed to complete any of the work. If opportunities for consultation are not used by staff, there is little chance of avoiding such situations. It also reinforces the learning support teachers' role as one of helping a few pupils to cope with a prescribed mainstream curriculum, rather than enabling them to help plan what and how the pupils should learn. The learning support teacher of the primary 3 class did have responsibility, over a short period, for the educational experiences of the target pupils. However, the class teacher also monitored closely the progress of the pupils, discussing this with the learning support teacher and looking at their work. This was important if the

pupils were to reintegrate to the work of the rest of the class at a later stage, which was the aim of providing support of this kind.

Although the learning support teachers, particularly in the secondary classes would provide help to the generality of pupils, their main commitment was clearly to the target pupils to whom they made frequent and regular visits throughout the lessons. One primary learning support teacher, however, stressed the importance of allowing the class teacher to maintain some contact with the target pupils:

> They went to (the class teacher) to get their next sheet. I usually try to contain them until I've marked it. They still want her calling their shots and I think she likes that too. She doesn't want to abandon them. They're very much her children, so what I usually do is, before they go I pull them back and say "Just a minute, I'll check if you're right", so they can take it to her with it marked and therefore her time is less.

The other pupils in the class tended to receive help from the learning support teacher only if they asked directly for it. Sometimes, however, the secondary learning support teachers intervened to reduce the number of pupils with hands raised, or queuing at the mainstream teacher's desk.

The presence of the learning support teacher in the class inevitably limited the amount of contact the class teacher made with the target pupils. For example, the learning support teacher of the P4/5 class made contact with one of the target pupils on nine occasions during a single lesson, compared with the class teacher who interacted with the pupil only once. A similar situation occurred in the secondary schools in which, for instance, the learning support teacher in one of the schools made contact with a target pupil seven times, whereas the class teacher had only two brief interactions. Table 6.2 provides an example of a sequence of interactions between the teachers and the target pupils during one part of a lesson.

Table 6.2: Interactions with the target pupils

Time	Teacher	Pupil	Cue	Support given
3 mins	LST	1	Teacher makes contact	Looks at work, tells pupil the calculations are wrong and instructs her to try again, using the counting blocks
1 min	LST	2	Teacher makes contact	Looks at work and tells pupil she is doing task correctly
1 min	LST	3	Teacher makes contact	Looks at work. Makes no comment
1 min	LST	4	Pupil indicates he has finished	Checks work, tells him to continue on next page
2 mins	CT & LST	2	Pupil goes to CT's desk, then to LST	No support from CT, who is busy with other pupils. LST looks at work and points out where it is incorrect. Tells her to try again.

LST: Learning Support Teacher
CT: Class Teacher

As the table illustrates, it was usually the learning support teacher who initiated the contact with the target pupils. This seemed to arise as a result of a general perception of need, rather than any explicit cue from the pupils. The pupil who did try to seek help from the class teacher was unsuccessful, as there was a queue at the desk. The pupil decided to return to the learning support teacher, where she was able to receive immediate help. The target pupils in the P3 class, as we have already reported, were taught a discrete lesson by the learning support teacher, with almost no contact from the class teacher.

It seems that there was fairly clear labelling of pupils with learning difficulties within the classroom, yet this was inevitable, if the target pupils were to get the amount of support which staff viewed them as needing. The four learning support teachers thought the pupils welcomed the extra support and attention they received. In the primary classes we observed, there was evidence of the target pupils' close association with the learning support teachers. For example, when the teachers first entered the classroom, the pupils often approached them to show them their work. In the secondary classes, the pupils appeared to have become rather more self conscious of the additional support they were receiving. Labelling, and the stigma associated with it, remains a highly contentious issue and considerable pressure is placed on teachers to seek ways of avoiding it. If learning support teachers are highly concerned about which pupils are receiving help from whom, it could move the focus of their attention away from the nature of the help provided. Where there are approaches to co-operative teaching which involve both mainstream and learning support in the planning and teaching of the curriculum for all pupils, the issue of labelling is unlikely to arise. In less ideal situations, perhaps learning support staff should accept the inevitability of labelling and to concentrate on their own interactions with the target pupils.

In both the primary and secondary classes we observed it seemed that the support provided by the learning support teachers was not distinctive in any way, but was more intensive, with frequent interactions with the target pupils. Yet, from our discussions with many mainstream staff from both sectors in our previous research, there are differences in perceptions of the role of learning support teachers. Mainstream teachers in the primary sector recognised learning support staff as providing help of this kind and valued them as an 'extra pair of hands'. Secondary mainstream teachers, on the other hand, tended to view learning support staff as having distinctive skills in relation to pupils with learning difficulties. Interestingly, learning support staff in both sectors undergo virtually similar in-service training in the form of the Diploma in Special Educational Needs. As far as learning support staff are concerned, neither perception of their role is entirely satisfactory. [The erosion of their own professional expertise is aimed ultimately at being recognised by mainstream staff as equal partners in all aspects of the curriculum.]

So far, we have suggested that the approaches to co-operative teaching have tended not to involve mainstream and learning support teachers in the joint planning and teaching of lessons. We recognise that such a level

of co-operation is largely an ideal scenario, and that learning support staff often accept readily a role which sees them more closely involved with a few children who have learning difficulties. Our evidence also suggests that the curriculum they followed and the distinctive kind of support they received has led unavoidably to some labelling. Yet, as far as the mainstream and learning support teachers were concerned, considerable success had been achieved through these particular co-operative teaching arrangements. Below, we consider what the teachers counted as effective co-operative teaching.

Effectiveness of Co-operative Teaching

Clearly, when the learning support teachers were not in the classroom, mainstream staff had to try to meet the needs of all pupils. In our discussions with learning support and mainstream teachers after the lessons, they both spoke a great deal of what might have occurred, had there been no co-operative teaching arrangement.

In the primary 3 class, explicit attempts had been made to resolve the difficulties of individual pupils. This was still at an early stage, but had been viewed as successful by the class teacher, who saw great improvements in the pupils' language abilities generally and specifically in their extended range of vocabulary. As far as the other three classes were concerned, there was little optimism that the pupils' difficulties would actually be resolved and so the staff identified other factors which had indicated to them that co-operative teaching had been effective. These focused on the learning support teachers and the extent to which they had achieved the following:

- preventing individual pupils from making serious errors, by correcting mistakes at an early stage
- helping these pupils to benefit more from the class lesson, by providing clarification, stimulating greater interest, or urging them to produce better or more work
- easing the burden on the class teacher, by reducing the pressure on them to interact with the target pupils, trying to prevent those with behavioural difficulties from becoming disruptive and assisting generally with class management.

The evidence which indicated to staff that these outcomes had been achieved was of the 'soft' variety, since they would be unlikely to try to prove, for example, that pupils would have made certain mistakes if there had been no co-operative teaching. Nevertheless, it is interesting that both groups of teachers should focus mainly on the outcomes for the target pupils, rather than on their professional interaction, of which we heard a great deal previously. We discuss each of the aspects of effective co-operative teaching below.

Preventing errors

Mistakes made by the target pupils were viewed by learning support teachers as potentially damaging to their self confidence and so they

emphasised the importance of being in a position to anticipate errors or correct them at an early stage. One learning support teacher, for instance, described how valuable early interventions often were for pupils when doing maths work:

> Often for them a counting error, if it's not done 'til after, they just see it as doing everything wrong. They don't always see it as, "I made a careless mistake, but I did the right thing". They get very frustrated if they're doing a sum and if they've followed every method and got it wrong. They feel as if they haven't got anything right, they're thrown completely. So I think that it is quite valuable to have that kind of on the spot assistance for them.

The learning support teachers saw themselves as successful in fulfilling a kind of 'nursing' role with the target pupils, checking them constantly to ensure that the pupils knew what they should be doing before they had started and correcting them if necessary. Routine visits to the pupils at least every five to ten minutes gave learning support teachers the opportunity to identify any errors either before or as they occurred. The benefits to the pupils of this kind of monitoring were thought to outweigh any risks there might have been of labelling.

Mainstream teachers agreed that the learning support staff were successful in picking up mistakes at an early stage, since they would not normally have the time to watch the target pupils as closely. They appeared, however, to be less concerned than learning support teachers about the effect upon the pupils' self confidence of making errors, perhaps from observing them when the learning support teacher was not in the class.

Enriching the pupils' experiences

Co-operative teaching was viewed by both mainstream and learning support staff as effective when the target pupils appeared to gain more from the lesson than they would have done with only one teacher. There were some differences, however, in the goals teachers had for the target pupils.

In the secondary classes, the target pupils were given the additional help they needed, for example with the reading of instructions or by suggesting vocabulary for a writing task, often to enable the child to 'cope' with the work set for the whole class. Fundamental difficulties, such as in reading, were not tackled explicitly, but instead the learning support teacher tried to ensure that they did not prevent the pupils from being successful. Learning support staff and, to some extent mainstream staff, believed that if the pupils were not helped in this way, they would have gained very little from the lesson, as much 'would have been beyond them'. In one class, which was involved in the reading of the novel, the learning support teacher tried to ensure that the target pupils were understanding the story as they progressed, by stopping frequently and asking questions. Referring to one part of the novel, the teacher said:

> I don't think they would have appreciated that incident if I hadn't been with them.

Staff in each of the primary schools had distinctive notions of how pupils' educational experiences were enriched. In the primary 3 class, it was the long term goal of both teachers that some of the pupils within the group would be able to perform as well as many of their peers, although they were less optimistic about others. The short intensive period of language work was aimed at improving the language ability of each of them to enable them to be more successful in future. The target pupils of the primary 4/5 class were following their own programme of maths work, although two of them had recently progressed to the SPMG scheme used within the mainstream. Enrichment for these pupils was seen as being able to work at their own pace, under constant supervision.

Learning support teachers often saw themselves as successful in encouraging the target pupils to produce more or better work than they might normally have done, either by stimulating ideas or simply cajoling an unmotivated pupil. However, it was not only the academic performance of the target pupils which the learning support teachers tried to improve through co-operative teaching. The frequent contact with the pupils enabled them to develop fairly informal relationships with them, which was viewed as important by both mainstream and learning support staff. This comment from a learning support teacher illustrates the distinctive nature of their interactions with target pupils:

> I spoke to her because she had a cold. She wasn't struggling with understanding what she was doing, but just wasn't really applying herself. So I was able to ask her how she was doing and joke a bit about her having a cold. Just to let her know I'm interested in her and not just in her work.

Sometimes, however, this became more problematic when the pupils reached secondary school age because they became more self conscious and reluctant to be in close contact with the learning support teacher.

So far, the successful co-operative teaching we have reported has focused on the pupils, either through intervention when they made mistakes or in the enrichment of their classroom experiences. The final aspect of effective co-operative teaching relates more directly to the class teachers and the support they received.

Easing the burden on the class teacher

Both mainstream and learning support teachers saw co-operative teaching as being effective, where the demands on the class teacher had been reduced. The needs of the target pupils were such that they required a substantial proportion of teacher time. Without co-operative teaching, staff said, these pupils would not receive the extent and nature of the help

they needed, because of the other pressures on mainstream staff. One secondary mainstream teacher explained:

> I think where there are children who need a lot of attention, learning support staff are used to dealing with children like that, where you can take that time, because a lot of the time, like today, it's very busy and...some of these children just need to have that time without putting pressure on you, because they must feel that there's other people waiting on you...Maths teachers are used to trying to get round everyone, whereas the learning support teachers can take the time with someone who really needs it.

The needs of the other pupils would also, staff thought, be less adequately met if there was no co-operative teaching. Because the learning support teachers tended to focus their support on the target pupils, the class teachers were able to concentrate more on the generality of pupils in the class. As one class teacher said:

> With someone like (child) who needs a lot of attention if (learning support teacher) wasn't in the room, then others would miss out.

Co-operative teaching, particularly in the secondary classes, was often seen as successful in preventing pupils with behavioural difficulties from becoming disruptive. In one class, for example, the learning support teacher was on hand to provide a particular pupil with help, whenever she appeared not to be working. Learning support staff also helped to minimise potential problems of discipline generally for the class teacher, as this comment from a learning support teacher illustrates:

> So I would circulate quite a bit and try to offset the effects of someone like (child), although the mucking about this afternoon didn't come from the quarter it usually does.

We observed the teacher doing this very discreetly, by having a quiet word with the pupils concerned. This contrasted with the class teacher's more overt approach to class discipline. Class management generally was clearly the responsibility of the mainstream teachers in the four classes we observed, and not an issue which the staff appeared to have discussed together.

In our previous work on co-operative teaching, learning support staff stressed the importance of their educative role in relation to their mainstream colleagues, but there was little evidence of this actually taking place and little mention of it in the interviews. This was not surprising, since some of the co-operative teaching relationships were newly established and our interview data suggest that it takes a great deal of time and effort for the learning support teachers to establish an educative role with their mainstream colleagues. We also know from our previous research that this was often the most ambitious and least

successful aspect of the learning support teachers' work. We have stressed the need for the senior management of schools to safeguard consultation time and to encourage this to be used by asking staff to produce evidence of this. The team leaders could also play a more substantial role in this respect, by helping learning support staff to identify and attain goals which concern the professional development of their mainstream colleagues.

Summary

In the lessons we observed, learning support staff tended to fulfil a role in which they provided help to a few pupils in the class, with little involvement in discussions about the curriculum or the co-operative teaching approach. Nevertheless, co-operative teaching was viewed as highly successful by both mainstream and learning support staff. It enabled those pupils with the greatest needs to receive direct and immediate help and, more generally, lessened the demands on the class teachers so that the needs of all pupils were being met more successfully. As far as some of the staff were concerned this was seen as a step towards more effective practice, in which learning support teachers were more fully involved, but clearly certain conditions are necessary to facilitate this. Opportunities for planning jointly need to be safeguarded by senior management, to enable mainstream and learning support staff to develop and evaluate their co-operative teaching strategies and to share their ideas about appropriate curricula for pupils with learning difficulties.

We have made some general suggestions as to how co-operative teaching might evolve. These are listed at the front of the report, together with our recommendations regarding the area learning support teams.

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